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HOW TO MAKE  
A PAGEANT







MISS MARY KELLY

*Frontispiece*

# HOW TO MAKE A PAGEANT

BY  
MARY KELLY

(AUTHOR OF THE PAGEANTS OF SELBORNE, RILLINGTON, BRADSTONE,  
LAUNCESTON, BUDE, AND "THE PITIFULL QUEENE," EXETER)



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## PREFACE

DURING recent years the amateur actor has received so much enthusiastic encouragement that he is in danger of becoming thoroughly pampered and spoiled. There is even a popular and comforting theory that the amateur's lack of training, experience, and discipline is of little account compared with the fact that he brings to his work complete sincerity, such as is unknown to his professional colleague. This has always seemed to me a peculiarly illogical idea. I have never been able to understand why those who devote their entire lives to the most arduous and heart-breaking profession in the world, should be considered less sincere than those to whom acting is merely a pastime for their leisure hours.

Yet there is one type of drama at which the professional will always be at a disadvantage compared with the amateur. In any type of crowd-work, the amateur will always outclass the professional. A few years ago, I produced at the Leeds Civil Playhouse Rolland's *Danton*, with a huge crowd of two hundred and fifty amateur supers. Immediately afterwards, I returned to London and produced a play in which the crowd scenes had to be suggested by twenty-five professional supers—or "extra gentlemen" as they were officially designated by a tactful management. I need not dwell on the difference between the two crowds. No professional management in England could have put on the stage a crowd of one-quarter the size or responsiveness of the huge band of amateurs at Leeds.



Unfortunately, the amateur theatre as a whole is so busily engaged in the hopeless task of trying to beat the professional at his own game, that not nearly enough attention is given to the various forms of drama of which crowd-work is a part. Anyone who has adjudicated at the British Drama League Annual Festival knows what a blessed relief it is to read on the programme that one of the plays contains a crowd, however small. It is a guarantee that now at least, if only for a few moments, there will be genuine vitality upon the stage, giving to the audience a thrill beyond the scope of the professional theatre.

I sincerely hope that Miss Kelly's book will be read not only by those amateur producers whose thoughts run in terms of performers by the hundred, but also by the innumerable playwrights who cater for the amateur. Perhaps the combination of efficiency and imagination with which Miss Kelly outlines the possibility of mass effect will inspire them to make some use, on however small a scale, of the tremendous potentialities of the amateur crowd, even if by "crowd" one means only half a dozen extras squeezing their way on to a tiny village stage. If only the writers of the endless stream of one-act plays, designed for amateurs, would realize that they have much finer material in the amateur crowd than in the amateur actor, perhaps audiences would have to endure fewer anæmic and trivial "one-acters" of the type which at the moment seems to be the staple affair of the amateur movement.

Looking over my collection of programmes of shows which I have seen, I find that I have been a not altogether willing spectator of fourteen pageants.

Twelve of these bring back to me the unhappy recollection of boredom of a type that is very near to being physical discomfort. Twelve of these did this. The other two provided me, as spectator, with memories which are outstanding among my experiences as a playgoer. These two pageants were sufficient to convince one that here is a great and infinitely exciting form of theatrical art, which too often descends, through lack of knowledge and the absence of any artistic standard, into a painful waste of infinite energy and enthusiasm.

Everyone who has ever seen a bad pageant and who is optimistic enough to hope ever to see a good one, should be profoundly grateful to Miss Kelly for writing this book. I cannot believe that in the future anyone will be so misguided as to attempt to make a pageant without reading this book, or so foolish, after having read it, as to make once more those mistakes which have marred so many pageants in the past, and which Miss Kelly so wittily and so constructively criticizes.

NORMAN MARSHALL



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# HOW TO MAKE A PAGEANT

## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IS A PAGEANT?

WE must be an optimistic people, for, in spite of the notorious uncertainty of our climate, we continue to produce pageants and outdoor plays. We like them, for we like being out of doors, we like space in which to move about freely, we like acting on horseback, and we like rehearsing on summer evenings when the sun is slanting across the trees and the yew hedges and when the swifts are screaming overhead. We shall continue to enjoy acting out of doors, however often the rain makes a disaster of the performance, and every year producers will be sent forth to organize a pageant or to find something pretty to act in the garden.

The producers usually return disheartened from the search for plays for the garden. They have lovely stages on which to perform them, stages that almost begin to write plays for themselves; smooth green lawns with a group of trees planted with a careful eye for composition, yew hedges that enclose the "paradise," and wide, shallow stone steps leading to terraces. It takes very little imagination to people these stages once more with the ladies for whom the gardens were made, and the gentlemen who courted them beneath the trees. Just this little stirring of fancy sets one off looking for the

play that will really suit the corner of the garden that makes so exquisite a background.

But the garden is critical, in spite of its quietness, it will not easily be suited, and there is always something missing from the outdoor plays, something that has yet to be found. Pierrot is convinced that it is himself, since he "got over" so well in eighteenth-century France, at the Fêtes Champêtres, and he is always pushing himself through the garden gate, only to find that the garden does not recognize him. Kings and Queens, and Famous Personages also seem a little lost, for they cannot shake off the flavour of the history-book, and, as everyone knows, it is impossible to learn history out of a book in a garden.

I think that what is missing is humanity, for our English gardens are most intimate companions of their owners, part of their life, and not an ornament that lies outside it. First enclosed for pot-herbs and fruit, then enlarged for flowers to delight the eye and sweet-smelling plants to lay among the linen, and then still further widened that the family might walk and play about them, they belong to human needs, and understand the very lives of their owners.

Garden plays are hard to find, because every garden has a personality of its own, which will intrude into the play, and empty, artificial plays become ridiculous against the background of quiet peace.

But still, we do outdoor plays because we like acting out of doors, even though the plays are inadequate; and, more ambitious still, we do pageants.

Pageants are increasingly popular all over the country, in spite of the uncertainty of the climate, and a great deal of time, trouble, enthusiasm, and money



YEW HEDGES AND CAVALIERS: BODDINGTON, GLOS.

goes towards their production. The two main reasons for their inception are: (*a*) local patriotism, and (*b*) the desire to make a large sum of money for a hospital or some other local charity. The reasons for their popularity are that they are pretty to look at, that they are great levellers of class, that they bring out talents in people who would never appear on an indoor stage, and that they are great fun for the performers. Occasionally a pageant is undertaken as a work of art, but this view of pageants is still so rare that they rank very low in the opinion of those who regard the drama as an art.

To the general public a "pageant" suggests a large-scale historical show in a number of unconnected episodes, real crowds, mass movement and colour, processions and horses, music and dancing, on a beautiful outdoor stage: first of all an appeal to the eye, and then an attempt to reproduce history in a romantic light. The players are entirely amateur, and most of them are not even regular amateur players, but have been drawn in from the tennis-courts, the barracks, the stables, the highways and the hedges, more or less willingly. The audience is large, uncontrolled, and ignorant: it is there to pick out its friends in unfamiliar clothes, to admire them or laugh at them, and to enjoy to the full any incongruity—not to experience any emotion or to make any effort of understanding or imagination. It expects little from a pageant, and is easily satisfied.

And the majority of pageants do resemble each other as closely as do peas. There is the Spirit of the Ages, or Father Time, or some such personage, who "narrates" (usually in rather halting blank verse) between the episodes, to explain what they are about. This is a

Good Thing, as otherwise one might not always be able to discover; or perhaps it would be a Good Thing, if the verse were less obscure. There are the Episodes—

The Roman Occupation of Britain.

The Founding of an Abbey by Edward the Confessor.

An Old Englysshe Fayre.

The Visit of Good Queen Bess.

The Arrival of Charles I on the Eve of a Battle.

The Stage-coach bringing the News of Waterloo.

Ending with a grand round-up of Spirits—of Peace, of Harmony, of the District Nursing Association, of the Women's Institutes and the British Legion, of Victory, of the Empire—all singing "Land of Hope and Glory." The "County" has walked on in every scene as principals, dressed in velvet and tinsel—crowds, dressed brightly in casement cloth and sateen, have covered the acting area—everyone has enjoyed him- or herself enormously and it has been "a Great Success."

It is difficult for the promoters to realize that, given lovely weather and a well-filled stand, the pageant was not so Great a Success as it appeared to be. Even though quite a large part of the audience comes from a sense of duty, and goes away bored, no serious criticism is ever heard, because of the social nature of the affair, and because the audience does expect so little. The performances are usually in aid of hospital funds, and it ill becomes either the neighbours or the local Press to do anything to lessen the box-office returns, when the object is so good and so local. The leading papers, if they notice a pageant at all, confine themselves to pictures and to a descriptive

account, with special reference to the setting, the weather, and the Persons of Quality who are taking part.

Such is now the conventional idea of a "Pageant" and such it will remain until some original and constructive minds, both dramatists and producers, realize its possibilities as drama, and lift it into a fine and potent form of artistic expression. When that happens, the whole attitude of players and audience will change; the pageant will no longer be merely a social affair, but a tremendous effort of imagination and presentation. The audience will no longer sit as apathetically as is possible on a wooden seat without a back, but will form part of the play as an audience should, and will be made to experience something that is thoroughly disturbing.

What then are the possibilities of the pageant as a form of dramatic art? Whether it deals with history, or with abstract ideas, it is a unique opportunity to treat a subject largely; to convey the philosophy of history through its presentation and to give abstract ideas strong dramatic expression. The value of the pageant to dramatist and to producer is that it can give mass emotion and mass expression to a greater degree than any other form of play; this is at once its opportunity and its problem. It is on the mass that the pageant is built, and it is on the power to use the mass as a means of giving dramatic life to an idea that the pageant-writer or the producer stands or falls. It is not enough that the pageant has 8000 performers, it is not enough to cover the acting area with human forms; it remains for the dramatic artist to make of the crowd a living entity, full of vitality and of meaning. That this



A REHEARSAL OF THE OKEANIDEN CHORUS AT DELPHI



is rarely done, we know only too well, but that it can be done, even with unskilled amateurs, has been shown from time to time, especially in the mass work of Russia, Germany, and Holland. Emotion is infectious, and, given some inspiration from the author and the producer, it is quite possible so to stir these raw crowds that they will lose all self-consciousness and be lifted together into a strongly felt and sincerely acted emotion.

In America, pageants are largely used to convey abstract ideas, and much experimental work of this kind has been done in the splendid outdoor theatres of that country. In England, we are rather more afraid of ideas, and our pageants are mainly historical presentation. If any definite idea lurks behind them, it is that of continuity, a vague desire to remember the days that are past, to "praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us," and to preserve, even if only for a little while longer, that bond which ties us to our country by an intimate love of some corner of it. Pageants certainly have been written round some central idea—Cookery, or Girlhood, or Handicrafts Through the Ages—but the ideas are feeble, and the book is generally deplorably improving. Yet we have as fine an opportunity as any country in the world to show in dramatic form the journey of man's spirit through time, and the slow unfolding and growth of ideal which history reveals; while from the width of human experience and comparison that is given by our empire, we might conceivably have a unique comment to make both on the past and on the future.

We have in the pageant form a grand opportunity for showing the real drama of history; the conflict between the individual and the mass, the force of

strong ideas driving men forward, the reaction from them that pulls them back, the dominance or the defeat of character and intellect, the growing-pains of humanity. We are concerned with something that is far bigger than a realistic reconstruction of a picturesque effect; our work is not only to represent history, but to interpret it.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CONCEPTION OF A PAGEANT

IN this form of drama there are three main elements: the Place, the Individual, and the Multitude, and each is equally important in an historical pageant.

Firstly, the Place. It is the place which generally suggests the pageant, for someone is impressed with the possibility of a ruined castle or abbey, or some other hoary relic, as a place for a pageant. The general idea grows out of this, for these ancient buildings always awaken some chord of pride and affection in those who belong to the district or town; perhaps they have played as children over the grassy mound of the castle, and the memories of the imagination they had as children stir in them, or they feel that affectionate pride that is born in those whose families have been burgesses of the same city for some hundreds of years. At any rate, the place begins it, and at once it must be realized as a personality, as part of the pageant and not merely a background. The site must therefore be chosen first, and the dramatist must know it well before he begins even to plan his pageant, and he must learn all he can from it. Almost always the place gives a definite lead; the background of a castle will bring in at once a suggestion of force, of battle and defence, of the turbulence of the world, and the power of arms; that of an abbey will remind the audience of the safety, the quietness, learning, charity, and holiness that the monasteries alone could bring into a world of storms. An old stone

or tree will link your history with pre-history. A bridge, an old cross-roads, a wayside chapel, all will give themes



PAGEANT OF LAUNCESTON, CORNWALL  
The Peasant Widows of the Cornish Rebellion, 1549

that can be used throughout. Again, the land is never far away from the drama of the scenes; there is the struggle for its possession, the pride that came from its

ownership, the cultivation of the wild places, and the gradual conquest and taming.

Secondly, the Individual. The further back we go in history, the stronger is the influence of the individual on the mass, and therefore your principal characters must be drawn in high relief, with a concentration of strength and simplicity. The pageant ground is no place for subtleties of mood, or a delicate interplay of character; your principals have to bring with them a definite idea so strongly expressed that it is almost symbolized. An instance of this simplifying, or symbolizing of human character is to be found in the Pilgrim's Progress, where the abstractions that are met with in the way are as real as any humans. It is usually the single person who represents the forward movement, who has a greater conception of the moment than the mass, and the drama will lie in the conflict between his moving idea and the conservatism of the crowd. The new idea has to force its way from the individual to the crowd, and his force of mind and character must either conquer all the united minds of the people, or be drowned by them. We find this again and again in history, in such scenes as the rebellion of Wat Tyler; the murder of Edward of East Anglia by the Danes, the Chartist Riots, and so on. The drama of one man against another, unless it is strongly backed by partisan crowds, is not enough for a large outdoor stage, but the drama of the individual as man against the mass has a tremendous opportunity here. The individual, then, must be drawn so clearly and strongly that he can be made to balance against a big force; he must be a little super-human, emphasized, and underlined.

Thirdly, the Multitude. The crowd represents humanity in general, and through it the gradual growth of the human mind is shown, and its conflict against the circumstances of its time. To realize this a very careful study is needed, for one has to understand, as far as it is possible to do, the attitude of each succeeding generation to life, and then to make the present generation understand it. The social conscience of to-day is far more tender than that of the past, and when we read history now it seems to show a tragedy that is more than human nature can bear. The mental and physical cruelty of man to man, the fear and suspicion that filled men's minds, the callous acceptance of suffering, and the uncertainty of life—all these make history terrible reading. It is difficult to lighten a pageant with comedy, if one realizes what the Good Old Days of Merrie England were. And yet there was comedy in plenty, rough humour and horseplay, and a great power of rejoicing, which was all the greater because of the constant presence of tragedy; people could enjoy themselves to the utmost when its shadow was lifted. The crowd may be the principal actor in a scene, united, full of purpose and intent on action, sweeping up over the event like a tidal wave; or it may be a background in strong contrast to the action of the principals, a fair broken into by a piece of strong tragedy, an atmosphere of sullen rebellion behind a piece of gorgeous pomp. But wherever it may be, or in whatever manner used, *it must always be an actor*, something that matters vitally to the action of the drama. There is a great field for experiment with the crowd in the use of some of the modern methods of production; the concerting of movement, stylization,

methods of speech, and so on, and we have much to learn in its use from the continental theatres.

Here then are some of the possibilities in this form of dramatic art; but it will be evident that they will be neither realized nor used unless the writer of the pageant is a dramatist of wide experience; the majority of pageants fail because of the quality of the "book." The whole form is new, and only a dramatist of experience and knowledge can attempt a new form with any hope of achievement. Historical facts are null and void unless they are lighted by imagination and handled with skill by a writer who is able to apply differing methods of treatment according to the subject and to the conditions of performance.

But what usually happens when a Pageant is in the air? The Local Committee searches about first of all for an author who will provide the book free, and the choice generally falls upon the most learned of the local archæologists, as he sits examining flint arrowheads in the pleasant study of his Georgian rectory. He, poor man, has never written a play, and but rarely goes to see one; he has never supposed that the mantle of the dramatist would fall upon him; but fall it does, and he has neither chariot of fire nor horses of fire. So he laboriously marshals dates, and facts, and local worthies, and, with a painful effort, swathes his well-loved history in blank verse or rhyming couplets. His feet become more and more entangled as these proceed, but at last he gives a sigh of relief and returns to his arrowheads. The book is then in the printer's hands, and lastly in the unfortunate producer's. But as all these labours have not succeeded in creating drama, the producer has nothing to produce, the players have

nothing to act, and all the enthusiasm and energy given to the organization are spent on something that has never breathed.

It is true that the study of history and of social life incident to a pageant is educational, however dull the book, but the information thus acquired does not compare with the sudden illumination that the drama throws on any event of human life. The only excuse for a pageant is that it is possible through this medium to make both players and audience live through a piece of concentrated experience of life, which, belonging to the past, is at the same time intimately related to the present and the future. If this is to be, the first essential is that the writer of the book shall be a dramatist. It is better still if he is also a producer, with the power to express himself in drama, colour, and music.

One cannot get music quite out of one's head in writing of pageants; this kind of dramatic composition seems to draw a kind of nourishment from music, and even to take its forms. A pageant resembles a symphony; it is a unity composed of differing parts that are so contrasted, and yet so related that each has an essential contribution to make to the whole. Each episode contains, and is built up on, some strong dominating mood which is expressed not only in the acting, but in the general rhythm and pattern of the scene: this mood is thrown into contrast by the moods of the episodes which precede and which follow it, and the audience is led from one to another into the general comprehension of the idea. (Something of this was shown in the delicately dream-like Pageant of Abinger in 1934, which had Dr. Vaughan Williams behind it.) Tragedy, comedy, fantasy, farce, mime, and ballad



all have their place in pageant-work; the dramatist has plenty of tools to work with, and of freedom for experiment—which makes it all the more regrettable that so many professional “Pageant-Masters” never get beyond the old routine of the “Circus-Pageant,” a mere display of horses and of clothes.

## CHAPTER III

### TECHNIQUE OF WRITING

It is apparent that the unusual opportunity of using mass movement and emotion given by the pageant brings with it the need for a technique in pageant-writing that differs from the technique of ordinary theatre-drama. Inside the theatre the mass may be suggested, and indeed strongly felt, but it is not actually there. On the pageant-stage, however, it is there, and because the mass is the basis of the pageant its use and its control must be carefully studied. It is for this reason that the writer of a pageant should also be a producer; crowd-work is a sensitive thing, depending on a close *rappor*t between the producer and the players, and it is impossible for anyone who has no experience of production to know what can or what cannot be done with a crowd.

The technique of pageant-writing has been little explored as yet, and the progress, since the pre-War pageants of Louis Parker, has been small. Here and there individual contributions have been made, as in the imaginative and effective Pageants of Guildford and of Chiddingfold by Graham Robertson, the Pageant of Mount Grace, by Lady Bell, and the Pageant of Norwich, by Nugent Monck. The Play and Pageant Union of Hampstead developed a style of its own, akin to the treatment of history in *Puck of Pook's Hill*. But, apart from these, there is still the tendency to be content with the conventional subjects, and the conventional

treatment, and to shirk the arousing of any real emotion. If the pageant is only a publicity stunt, or a snob parade, these subjects and this treatment are adequate, but if a real pride in the town or village prompts the desire to honour its past, the dramatist has a cast and an audience worthy of the full exercise of his imagination and powers. There are three reasons why pageant-technique makes no progress—

*Firstly*, the Organizing Committee does not regard the book as of any importance at all.

*Secondly*, it is so rare for any author to write more than one pageant that there is a complete lack of cumulative experience.

*Thirdly*, the publication of pageant-books being purely local, and the edition usually sold out, other pageants are not easily accessible to the writer, and consequently neither he nor the promoters ever read any but their own. The British Drama League has made a collection of pageant-books, to serve either as an example or as a warning, and is also prepared to give special advice on the subject, but it is only occasionally that writers realize that both comparison and advice may be useful in the task of composing a pageant.

Leaving until another chapter the question of subject and material, let us first consider what the manner of treatment should be if the pageant is not only to make a fine show but also to convey ideas in dramatic form. There are certain conditions common to all outdoor work which go towards creating technique.

(a) *The Audience*, to begin with, is very large, is at a distance from the players, and is not under the

discipline of the theatre; it is cinema-fed, and is therefore more accustomed to look than to listen.

(b) *Most pageants are performed in daylight*, but it is impossible to forecast before writing whether they will be played in brilliant sunlight, driving rain, obscuring mist, or a howling wind. Lighting and sound effects are "circumstances over which there is no control."

(c) *There is no curtain*, so that scenes must be both begun and finished.

Now these conditions are the limitations and the opportunities of the artist's material, they must be considered in every aspect of the pageant, but the first, that of the audience, is the most important of all. There is no need to write down to an audience of this kind, nor to suppose it incapable of being stirred; on the contrary, it is closely observant, and its very size makes an emotional reaction fairly easy to get, because emotion is infectious. But it is not at first predisposed to emotional reaction—it is in a casual mood—and writer, producer, and players have got to put their backs into their work, if they are to get it across.

For the writer, I think that one may say that the secret of his success lies in his understanding and use of *Emphasis*. He has to discover the prevailing emotion of any given scene, to simplify and broaden it, and then to give it all the weight that he can, in order to force it home upon the audience. Because the scene is played at a distance from the audience, so that the figures are very much smaller to it than are those of stage-players, and because there is no help from lighting to make anything or anyone stand out, both writing and production must be broadened in order to make the drama appear

in full relief. A pageant stage is no place for subtleties, everything must be drawn in boldly and simply, even to the point of exaggeration.

A scene representing the stirring of a rebellion will illustrate this. First of all the dramatist has to show the background and first cause of his event, by introducing the accumulating grievances which finally cause the rebellion. These grievances may not be strong enough to unite the groups or individuals who nurse them, but they will be sufficiently strong to draw them together into a common meeting place, and to give them some voice; at this opening there will be some ebb and flow of ideas, some check perhaps, or some opposition, but the general feeling will be the same. Then there may be the anticipation of the strong personality who will unite them, and finally there may be his speech, inciting them to action, playing upon the emotions already shown, drawing these emotions together, until at last, in one final rush of enthusiasm, he carries the whole mass with him.

In such a scene it is easy enough to give emphasis to the fiery oration—the leader will be raised, his points will be echoed by shouts from the crowd, and the emotion will gather impetus throughout. But it will not be so easy to build up the first idea of sullen resentment in the crowd, because such a feeling is so often repressed by fear, which does not find a ready outlet in speech or action. But it is important that this should be established carefully, in order that the contrast between the stagnation of a slavish fear, and the courage gained by inspiration should be made very strong indeed. In writing this scene, the dramatist must guard against the temptation to make his crowd too individual, and to

introduce too much information: out of a mass of possible grievances he should choose a few, and bring these out. He must not depend on the explanation in the programme to make his idea clear to an uninstructed audience, but he must make it see and feel that here are people stricken and oppressed, and that here is a fire of faith that will lift them above oppression. Dates and facts are of secondary importance to the audience, but this is a piece of universal human experience, and it is as such that it will reach its audience.

The audience must *see* and feel it. This brings us to what is really the fundamental principle of pageant work, whether in writing or production—*Action comes before speech*. The main expression in a pageant is action, and the dialogue is, as it were, forced out by the action, coming when it is absolutely necessary in order to make the action doubly clear, by casting a high light on it. For example, the rush of an angry crowd will carry words with it, shouts, oaths, short exclamations, which, though they appear confused, will yet bring out the cause of the anger, and heighten the effect of the rush. It may be stemmed by a man of strong courage, and he, too, will need words; he must speak, and speak with strength and vigour, with intensity and economy—but the rush and the check will convey the drama first.

Action comes before speech in human life, and action comes before speech in this large-scale view of human life; the writer must think in terms of action before he allows himself to think of speech.

The recognition of this truth leads to a number of “dumb-show” pageants; but these are rarely effective. The players in them, unless they are perfectly trained in physical expression, find themselves brought up short

at the most dramatic moments, cut off from their climax for lack of words, and their acting becomes lifeless and uninteresting. There is all the difference in the world between a pageant that is really mimed, and one that is played without words by untrained amateurs. English bodies are inarticulate.

The proportion of dialogue to action is a matter of experiment, and a good deal will be given or taken away at rehearsals as need arises. Much of the acting is done more effectively in silence, or to music, and the formalized movements of religious processions, of mourners, or of a king with his followers need no words; but as a general rule the action will require dialogue of a special kind. It should consist only of the most necessary speech, it should be definite and emphatic, and should convey strong, simple emotion. The speech of the crowd should be given them—"rhubarb and potatoes" are no use here—for the mood of the scene is lost if the crowd does not understand the direction of its ideas. It wants a collection of short forcible sentences, not printed in the book, but just handed to them by the producer in rehearsal. He will then balance them, so that out of a babel of sound the necessary idea floats to the surface. The dialogue of the principals contrasts with that of the crowd in being more developed, but even here there must be strict economy; their speeches must be short, and even when a sermon or political speech is introduced, it should only seem to be long. At the same time, short, chippy "Coward" dialogue is dangerous, for thought travels slowly over a distance, and it takes very much longer to establish an idea out of doors. For this purpose, a certain amount of repetition is needed, which may be exemplified in the



THE OLD ÆLDERMAN CARRIED BY HIS THANES: BRADSTONE, DEVON



introduction of important characters. Where half a sentence, or a gesture, may suffice in the theatre, the pageant arena and audience require about ten times as much. If Richard of Bordeaux is to make a formal entrance, the appearance of the Royal Herald, with his coat-armour and trumpeter, speaks to the eye; his lengthy proclamation, giving the King's name and full title, to the ear; then the procession, in which the King's colours, and his famous device of the White Hart are constantly repeated, leads gradually to the climax of the King's person. The entry of a messenger at full gallop, shouting his message to a quiet group from afar, the shattering of the quiet, the eager questioning of the group and the rousing of expectancy will all help to build up an entrance—or the fleeing away of group after group of people, in obvious terror and confusion. In the first, the dialogue will be loud and quick, the questions only variants of the same theme, the answers always the same; in the second the fugitives will cry the names of their pursuers in a confused outcry—"The Norsemen! the Norsemen! The Black Danes! the Raven!" etc.

In any pageant *the speech must be dynamic*; there is no time for the slow unfolding of mental processes by means of dialogue.

Apart from the seeming-realistic treatment that I have described, there is another very powerful medium to be used in Concerted Speech. We can hear it in the speech of the crowd at Oberammergau, but it is there the survival of an old convention which now seems curiously out of place in a highly realistic performance. But Concerted Speech, as it is used in such modern plays as *The Adding Machine*, *Todtenmahl*, and *Murder in*

*the Cathedral*, has a definite place in the non-realistic pageant, of which I will treat later.

Poetry, from its very delicacy and subtlety, belongs more properly to the smaller outdoor play, or to the masque than to the large arena of the pageant, and indeed it would hardly be necessary to discuss it under this heading if it were not that so many pageants are, unfortunately, written in verse. Some inner voice seems to prompt the tyro to write thus, and I think that this voice is the distant echo of the masque. Be that as it may, he feels that it ought to be verse, and verse it is—or rather doggerel. No worse medium could possibly be found than this uneasy blank verse, or these stilted couplets; they are completely static, the drama being held up while Kings, Peasants, and Spirits alike pour out their full hearts in interminable rhyme. Spirits are the worst offenders, for, since what they have to say is vague, indeterminate, and wholly unnecessary, there is very little reason why they should ever stop saying it.

Bad verse is one pitfall, and Wardour Street medievalism is another. In some pageants the verse is kept for the Spirits, while the realistic characters speak "tushery." In this one can see the laudable intention of keeping mortals and immortals in different conventions, but if tushery is intended to convey the realistic speech of any given period, it fails in its purpose, for it belongs to none. To garnish the dialogue with "Zounds!" "Methinks," and a curious entanglement of tenses is not to give any kind of historical atmosphere. The speech must at all costs be dramatic, and the choice lies between modern English and the language of the period. The first alternative appears easier than

it is, a real mastery over modern English is necessary if the writer is to use it as the expression of an older life and thought. But if the writer is accustomed to the use of good dramatic English, and can get the effect of colloquialism without jarring inappropriateness, he is wise to employ it, for the players will be at home in it, and the audience will understand it without effort. It is, however, possible to use a simplified form of the idiom of each period without archaisms, and I think that if this is done very carefully, the scenes gain considerably in atmosphere. It is, of course, the colloquial speech of the period that is needed, not the language of state documents, and this is best studied in letters, diaries, novels, and plays until the idiom is quite familiar. Special care is needed for short emotional exclamations, expletives, and oaths, as these mark their period very strongly. I have often desired a handbook on oaths, for in pageants one is often concerned with a life of violence, and those who live violently swear heartily. One should know when it was correct to swear by the saints, and when by classical deities; one should know too about the strong language of ladies, from the "by Seint Loye" of the Prioress in the *Canterbury Tales*, to the "Great God!" that fell so genteelly from the lips of Jane Austen's heroines.

If the speech is made too archaic, it hinders the actors, and anything that hinders the actors should be cut out; but each period has its own rhythm, its own form and tempo, and above all, its own humour; a great deal of atmosphere is lost if all this is ignored.

The writer and the producer work closely together in the *creation of the crowd*; it is for the writer to make out of it a dramatic personality, and to plan its general

movement, action and reaction, while the producer will carry out and strengthen his effects. It is for the writer, too, to get the general proportion of crowd to individual on which so much of the dramatic interest depends. In the realistic convention a mass of people will rarely gain the sympathy of an audience so long as it remains only a mass; it is necessary to sum up its emotions, and bring them to a head in certain individuals or small groups which are typical of the whole. In the mass-work of the Russian theatre the mass does not require this individualization, but the English character, and therefore English art, does not express itself in the complete merging of the individual in the mass. A sympathetic link with the audience is more easily obtained if the "man in the street" is seen and is allowed to speak for himself. We find instances of this in the Forum Scene in *Julius Caesar*, and in other crowd scenes by Shakespeare. When the "man in the street" has spoken for himself, and allied himself with the audience, he may be allowed to go back into the crowd, which will itself gain in force through this individual interpretation of its meaning. The larger the stage, however, the less this individualization of the crowd is possible, and a middle way may be found by multiplying the individual into a small family or group which stands out in relief now and then.

When it is a question of the conflict between the crowd and *the individual*, it is necessary to consider the size of the stage before deciding how far the individual can stand alone. On a reasonably small enclosed stage, the single figure may be able to gain its effect, but on the large arena it will be too small to carry very much weight of character. It is possible then to magnify it

and give it a special emphasis in various ways. One obvious method is to mount the character—always provided that he is a good horseman. The horse responds so readily to the emotion of a sympathetic rider that it actually strengthens it: you may show Charles I vacillating on foot, but he will be three or four times as vacillating if he vacillates on a horse. Or the character may be enlarged by a group of partisans, who may or may not be allowed to speak, but who add weight to the idea carried by the individual. An interesting instance of the use of single characters is found in one of those rare instances in which real life and drama coincide—the meeting of Wat Tyler and his peasants with the young King Richard II. On both sides there is the typical figure symbolizing an idea carried by his followers; there is the drama between the two sides, and then between the two individuals. The dramatic climax being reached at the murder of Wat Tyler, a magnificent effect is got by the action of the young King in detaching himself from his partisan following, and putting himself at the head of the opposing side. The whole event could not have been better planned, even if Shakespeare had created it. The Greeks enlarged their individual by the use of masks and of the colthurnus, and of course in any stylized pageant masks would be a very simple way of getting this effect. But by whatever means it is achieved, it is always necessary to reinforce the individual, to make him seem a little larger than life if he is to balance the crowd.

## CHAPTER IV

### DECORATION OF THE PAGEANT

PAGEANTRY depends so much on the appeal to the eye that the writer should make himself thoroughly familiar with the various forms of "embellishment" that can be used. Processions, masques, puppet shows, popular entertainments, music, and dancing, all have their place in this type of decorative drama, and all have possibilities, not only as decoration, but as part of the dramatic scheme. Those who saw the 1935 Jubilee procession can testify to the moving effect that it had on the crowd—not from its gorgeousness, nor from any pomp and ceremony, but from the human appeal of its complete simplicity, and from the sincere affection with which it was greeted. The use of a small and simple procession where a fine and pompous one might reasonably be expected is generally moving, and any procession should have an emotional effect of some kind. The character of a procession must be studied carefully, and built up by every detail used; the writer must be careful over the composition of his processions, and must know exactly how they would be made up, and how far the emotion of each would be felt and shown by the people taking part in it. If a King is to appear in full splendour, then pomp should be studied in everything, and no opportunity of making the company magnificent should be lost; if defeat or sorrow is the note, everything should then be planned to convey this emotion throughout. I shall never forget how

the men of the British Legion, at the first rehearsal of the Pageant of Launceston, showed me the entrance of the starved, wounded, and exhausted remnant of an army "that would not give over while life or limb lasted." At the final performance too, it was the entry of this small trailing company of foot-soldiers that held the audience, rather than that of the brisk and gaily-dressed conquerors on horseback. The writer then, in the course of his research, must discover the right people to put into any procession, the ceremonies or ritual to be observed, and the general feeling that it must convey; the producer will then have the more difficult work of carrying out the effect.

The various forms of public entertainment, from the "pageant" of the Guilds which travelled the streets to the classical masques of the Elizabethan Court, are valuable decorative and comic material, though they must always be curtailed. The "pageant," or open stage on wheels, is easily constructed (or adapted from a haywain or lorry), and the acting of some old play on this will make an amusing interlude in a big crowd scene. The masque was not, properly speaking, an outdoor play, being written for performance in the great hall, but it is a piece of fine decoration on such an occasion as the entertainment of Queen Elizabeth or James I by some city or lord, and of delightful caricature when played by such amateurs as Holofernes and his company in *Love's Labour's Lost*. In these we get stylization to the last degree, masks, gorgeously fantastic dresses, and elaborate ships, castles, and the like, made to contain the performers. The charm of the Elizabethan dances and music, added to all this fantasmagoria, helps to make the masque a very gay and

pleasant affair. It is necessary to make a study of masques and their contemporary production, if the full flavour of their ridiculously gorgeous and queer effect is to be got.

The festivals and ceremonies of the country are also effective, and give to the scene a curiously ancient feeling. The Maygames, the Horn Dance, the Crying of the Neck all belong to the old ritual drama of Nature-worship, and the manner and costumes of the performers, where they still exist, even now carry with them something of the solemnity of worship. In earlier days, this feeling must have been even more conscious, for the countryman has always been a pagan at heart, and they should never be treated in country scenes merely as entertainments that would cause laughter in the on-lookers. All such festivities, however, ended in licence and drunkenness, as a natural result from the religious ecstasy which originally caused, or was caused by, the dance, and a rough gaiety would pervade the scene. Then there are the travelling entertainers, whose name was Legion, and who wandered about from fair to fair, picking up a precarious living—the jongleurs, tale-tellers, ballad-singers, dancers, fortune-tellers, and puppet-show men; there were quacks, tooth-drawers, white or black witches, friars, summoners, pilgrims—a host of people who made money with one-man shows, or pretended science. All these elements will help to build up an air of gaiety, and will add a note of fantastic unreality to the scene.

Songs and dances are very often a pitfall for the beginner, for they may delay the dramatic action very considerably. Yet they are valuable, not only as decoration, but as adding to the general emotional effect. A



little melancholy pipe-tune will float up above all the clamour of a market-scene with a poignant effect, a trumpet call is startling and exciting, and singing of any kind will always attract the attention from speech or action. But both music and dancing must be, as cooks say, "floated lightly to the mixture" lest they spoil the dramatic effect, and both must be considered very carefully. Naturally, in any historical scene, the music and the dances must be of the period represented, but it is easy now to ensure this accuracy, and various books on these subjects are included in the bibliography at the end of this book.

But apart from their accuracy—the producer's business—the author has to see that they are used only as part of the general structure, and as much and as little as he wants. Very often it is only a little piece of a dance that is needed, for a group of peasants perhaps to hear a tune, to pick up the dance, to be distracted by something else, and to stop dancing. But your Folk-Dance enthusiasts will dance their Rufty-Tufty to the end, and the Choral Society will have their sing out, no matter what the business of the scene demands, unless someone stops them. Both singing and dancing may be used very effectively between the scenes, but I shall consider that later.

Entrances and exits differ from those of the theatre, and they are by no means easy to contrive; each scene has to begin, and to end at a distance from the dramatic focus, and the obvious danger is that of a tedious beginning and an ending that is anti-climax. The public admires long-distance entries—"It was so lovely to see them coming for half a mile through the trees!" But while they were coming half a mile, what was happening

to the stage? The attention of the audience was drawn to the moving figures, and the drama on the stage was killed. There is a fine decorative effect to be got from long ceremonial processions, full of pomp and heraldry and gorgeous dresses; there is a thrill of excitement in a rush of horsemen at full gallop, but there is with these a real danger of stopping the drama unless they are carefully used. The author must be sure of some shorter entrances, and if possible, one that is quite near the acting area. A background of dark trees will give some mystery to an entrance, and the audience may be allowed to see lurking among the trees figures who will later rush in upon the scene; or fairies may be stored up in the trees, to drop down when they are required. Special surroundings will give special entrances and exits, and the author should be quite sure of what he will get in this way before he begins to write. If the ground provides nothing that will give a short sudden entrance, it may be necessary to use scenery, in the form of a house, or a gateway.

When the book is ready for the producer it will be found to consist very largely of stage directions, and great care must be given to these. This is another reason why the author should have a working knowledge of production, since he ought to know what is possible out of doors and what is not, and to be able to make some kind of guess at the timing. The dramatist must test the timing of his action in order to know where the focus of interest will be at any moment, and must shape his scene accordingly; later, the producer will modify this, but the dramatist must understand that a great part of his work is in the stage directions, and that they are as important as, if not more so than, the dialogue.

Stage directions should not be wordy, but they should give enough description for the crowd to understand what it is doing and feeling throughout. Briefly, the stage directions should be explicit, definite, and descriptive.

I have so far dealt only with the realistic pageant, or at least that which appears realistic to the audience. In practice, however, the appearance of realism is always attained, even in this type of pageant, by a process of formalization which magnifies the dramatic event by the elimination of a mass of irrelevant detail which would surround it in the actual happening, so that even the realistic pageant is not entirely photographic in its representation or conception.

But the non-realistic pageant, based on dance-drama, music, concerted speech and movement, with strongly stylized effects, offers a new and a great opportunity to the artist. The mass work of some of the modern schools of movement, more especially perhaps that of Rudolf von Laban, and the harmonious interpretation of music and movement taught by Jacques Dalcroze in Eurhythmics both show its possibilities. The experiments of the Russian Soviet Theatre, in bringing the mass action outside the limits of the stage, and uniting players and audience, have been extremely interesting, and some fine mass expression has also been used among the Youth groups of Holland. We have later to look for a further growth in this type of work from the Ohel Players in Palestine, with their open air theatre for an audience of 20,000. In Africa, all drama is still rooted in the dance, and expression by rhythmic movement and song is instinctive and powerful. We have much to learn from the African—if indeed it were



CROWD GROUPING: "KATERINA ISMAILOVA" AT THE MOSCOW THEATRE

ever possible for us to recapture the strength and perfection of movement that comes from the splendid physique of a people still young enough to retain a harmony with Nature. The ritual or fetish dance is still carried on among the Bantu tribes, and we may see the history of the drama in all its stages in the continent of Africa; but, apart from this particular interest, we may see here, as in Russia, the dramatic expression of a community united in life and ideal. Among all the Bantu tribes the dance is a communal thing, the expression of the tribe rather than of the individual; the general form is that of the early Greek drama: one, or perhaps a few separate dancers develop the whole idea of the group, while the mass of dancers carries it out as a kind of chorus. Through the influence of Achimota College in Nigeria (where the education is directed towards the perfecting of the tribal life by a sane introduction of the best in European science and culture) one important move forward has been made, which may result in a great contribution to the dramatic art of the world. The tribal dance has been enlarged and inspired by the cultural influence of the College, in one instance at least, into an expression of general and universal ideas without the imposition of a foreign form and technique.

Action comes before speech, and goes beyond speech; action is a universal language which needs no interpreter; we have in dance-drama and rhythmical mass expression a form of art in which the Old World meets the New, and through which all the peoples of the world can speak to each other.

## CHAPTER V

### READING FOR THE PAGEANT

THE subject of a pageant is generally the history of a place, a trade, or a profession. At its most commonplace, it is merely a statement of fact—that Queen Elfreda built a church here (and she is shown with a suitable company stating that she will build a church there), or that Henry IV gave the town a charter, and he is seen, also with a suitable company, giving the town a charter. But treated more imaginatively it is history floodlit by the drama. Whether treated imaginatively or not, however, history is the material out of which the pageant is made, and the discovery and selection of the material needs a great deal of care and consideration.

The Pageant Committee is always eager to see represented everything that ever happened in the town or county, and every famous person that was even remotely connected with it; and the enthusiasm of its members is sometimes a stumbling block to the dramatist. His first work is to establish a firm but tactful relationship with his Committee, and to induce it to trust his experience and to accept his treatment of the facts. If he is working with the Local History Society of any county, he will find that it can give a kind of help that is not to be got in any other way; its members will have made a thorough study of their respective subjects, and he will be able to learn from them not only the facts of history, but something of the relationship between the

place and the people that is so essential to his understanding of the history; and also a good deal of tradition that has never been written down. They will be in touch with the old people who remember clearly the social life of their childhood, small illuminating events, and scraps of tradition which can be made into a whole by a fuller knowledge of folklore. At Ridlington in Rutlandshire, I heard from the villagers quite vivid accounts, that had been handed down orally, of small skirmishes that had taken place in the parish during the Wars of the Roses, and of the hurried flight of a family that had been implicated in the Guy Fawkes plot. A knowledge of the place and the people is necessary if the pageant is to belong to its players, and to mean anything to them, and it is almost impossible to express the inner life of the place if the author writes entirely from outside. If he does not live in the place, and cannot spend much time there, he should be in close touch with people who have this knowledge and understanding of the past life of the place.

Round all old places a mass of fictitious history has grown up now—meresentimental or facetious journalese, which has been dished up for tourists so long that the people of the place have come to believe it, and will often be the most eager in demanding that it shall be included: the writer has to pick his way carefully, and to use a good deal of tact in getting rid of these old familiar fakes, so dear have they become. There will, however, be a wealth of genuine information on which to draw, and he will be concerned mainly with a process of selection and adaptation. Now an historian knows how to read history, but a dramatist may be quite unaccustomed to doing so, and may find a real difficulty

in tackling his subject. It may not be amiss, therefore, to suggest methods that I myself (not being an historian) have found useful in collecting historical material for pageants.

The absorption of facts must come first, before the imagination is allowed off the lead, and one must make oneself thoroughly familiar with the real history of the place or district by a careful study of reliable and unbiased authorities. In most instances the *Victoria County History* will give the necessary basis for local history, and will give references to other authorities on each subject. In making this local study, one will note particularly the effects of such great national movements, as the Civil War, the Reformation, and others, on the district. If an episodic pageant is required, one will be gradually making a selection of those events that are promising as dramatic material and that bear some special significance, always remembering the necessity for a connecting idea, for contrast in mood, and for some degree of spacing throughout the centuries.

When the survey of local history is complete, the scenes should be chosen; and now another process of reading begins—the study of social life, character, and general atmosphere. The bare facts are known, and one has to discover why they happened, what were the motives and what the reactions of those who made and who suffered them. When historically famous characters are to be introduced, the *Dictionary of National Biography* is usually the initial source of information, and the bibliography at the end of each life in this work shows the way to further investigation; there will also be the more modern books on such personalities, which give a psychological as well as an historical study of the



character. Further guidance in the matter of reading will be found in the bibliography at the end of this book. This kind of reading is engrossingly interesting, and takes a great deal of time; often it is necessary to read several books in order to get a clear picture of some very minor character with perhaps a word or two to say. Each period must be taken separately and chronologically, and studied with the greatest care; one must be familiar with the general social life of each, and indeed so soaked in its atmosphere that one almost lives in it for the time being. The characters must be studied in detail, and if little information is forthcoming about any one of them, it may be necessary to study the whole class or profession to which he belonged in order to create him. I remember how long it took me to discover the probable personalities of two parish priests in the twelfth century, whose quarrel formed the basis of a scene.

During this period of study it is not necessarily the cool, accurate historians who help one, for one is now reading for that stirring of the imagination that will set the scene in motion. Anything may do this, a novel, a letter, a little note in a churchwarden's account, but it is the strongly prejudiced writer who will make the scene vivid. It would be impossible to treat a Civil War scene without discovering what Clarendon had to say about the people and the event; and in *Piers Plowman* there is just that strength of comment that one needs. No one views the events of his own time dispassionately, and the writers who give one these events in the light of strong personal feeling are the most likely to reveal one at least of the causes of them; moreover, since these prejudiced views are generally caused

by sympathy with or antipathy towards personalities, they help to show these personalities as they appeared to the people of their time. Besides these biased histories, there are numbers of books on social life and customs, letters, diaries, memoirs, and so on, all of which supply detail and throw light on personality. The plays, stories, and novels of any period will give "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure," and the reminiscences of old inhabitants now fit into their places.

The episode of any period should be written before the next is studied, for one then has to pull oneself out of one century, and plant oneself in the next—no very easy process, and one that needs time. But Time is a factor often forgotten by pageanteers, who decide at an enthusiastic meeting held in March, to produce a pageant in July, and descend upon the unfortunate dramatist with a demand for a five-episode pageant to be ready in May at the latest. If the pageant is to be worth acting at all, the dramatist will want six months careful study at least before he can finish the book, and he will be hard put to it to accomplish his task even in that time.

Having absorbed facts and persons thoroughly, and chosen the episodes, the history has to be "treated," and at this point the serious historian is apt to fall foul of the dramatist. But if the dramatist has first made an honest study of fact, he should be allowed a free hand over this process, for the conversion of history into drama is not easy, and there must be a certain rearrangement of facts. The purpose of this treatment is to bring the events within the imaginative understanding of the people of to-day; the dramatist has to interpret the past as he shows it, and this interpretation is

given only by the concentration, the enlargement, and the strong light of Drama. No one fully understands his own times, and therefore to show the events exactly as they happened is to leave the audience almost as much in the dark about their real significance as were the people to whom they happened. There may be a series of events—such as the climax of the Wat Tyler rebellion to which I have already referred—which are drama in themselves; but more often the facts of several days have to be put into one, or unrecorded incidents and characters introduced, in order to strengthen and clarify the scene.

## CHAPTER VI

### FORM AND SUBJECT OF PAGEANTS

A PAGEANT is usually a collection of unrelated episodes, and the Pageant Committee's desire to see every event of local history represented is apt to make these far too numerous, so that no single piece of drama can be properly developed. Though this is the generally accepted form of pageant, there is no reason at all why it should always remain so, and the dramatist must make his own limits about the number of episodes to be included. In Rothenburg, as in some other German towns, one important scene in the civic history has been singled out for dramatic representation, and the playing of this one scene has become traditional. The theme is fully used, and the songs and dances of the district have become part of it, so that it is a true piece of communal drama, grown up out of the life of the people. During the Thirty Years' War Rothenburg fell, after a long siege, into the hands of the Catholic Army under General Tilly, who threatened to hang the whole council for their prolonged resistance. As a joke, however, he offered to save their lives if one of them would drink an enormous goblet of wine; George Nusch did this, and saved the lives of the other Councillors. No romantically heroic action, but one that expresses the strong civic devotion and pride so characteristic of Germany.

We may learn a practical lesson from the German and Swiss pageant-plays: we should make the history

of any place far more interesting if we were content with single-episode pageants, treating each event fully, and giving it a real chance as drama. If there were six events in the history of any town or village that were worth representation, a cycle of six plays might be written, and one performed every year or every other year. The organization would simplify itself every time; a technique of pageant-playing would be developed among the players, so that much of the carelessness and crudity of pageant production would disappear, and a fine piece of communal drama might very well result. The history of a county could be treated in a similar way, either in a cycle of plays on the more notable incidents, or developed village by village in a series of pageants.

The latter method offers to Rural Community Councils a special opportunity for bringing their different activities together, and for doing really creative work in the drama. The Local History groups would be asked to co-operate with the Drama groups in the composition of small pageants, the history supplied by the former being turned into drama by the latter under the guidance of drama instructors who had both a sound knowledge of the technique of play-writing and the gift of drawing out the creative powers of others. It would certainly be possible to get a drama class to discover, by discussion, the dramatic possibilities of any event, and then by mutual contribution to build it up into a play. Such a method would have its dangers, of course, and should only be attempted by instructors who had special gifts, but interesting experiments in this communal play-writing have already been made by the Carolina Playmakers in America and by others.

The play-cycle would, however, be lacking in one element which may be considered an essential in a pageant: the sense of continuity would almost inevitably be lost; for, although the events would be treated chronologically, the audience, differing at every performance, would not take each as a part of the whole.

The educational value is particularly great in the village pageant, since it is easier to get the community permeated with the spirit of each episode by the study and preparation of it, than to inspire a large unwieldy cast. The players and their friends will probably meet on winter evenings to read and study their episode, to make costumes and props, to learn music and dancing under the guidance of their producer, and he will then have the opportunity to talk informally about the people who wore the clothes, about the agriculture and ownership of the land, and about the general method of life in the period with which they are concerned. A common workroom for the pageant and a special night each week for pageant work will be found most valuable for arousing interest both in history and in the drama, and in the friendly process of making and planning things together, stories of queer characters and strange events will creep out that would never have come to the surface in ordinary conversation.

Now many people—perhaps most people—are apt to say, "Ours is such a little place, nothing can ever have happened here," and on the surface it may seem so. But just begin to search and the whole village takes on a different air. It may lie in a sunny haze, filled with the sound of insects and punctuated by the cuckoo, on a summer day—indeed it has always known how to do that—but there is no question that beneath this

apparent peace there has been as much human emotion as in any crowded town; and the lives of the people will to-day, as in the past, show the strongest and starkest drama. Most of us know nothing of what village life is now, and we know still less of what it has been. There is no need to drag travelling queens for miles out of their way to make material for a village pageant; the endless drama of squire, parson, and people will give you all that is wanted. There was that day before the Civil War when Mistress Bidlake and Mistress Ellworthy fought tooth and nail in the churchyard, because Mistress Ellworthy, the farmer's wife, went into church before Mistress Bidlake, the Squire's lady; there was that distressing service on Christmas Day, when Laomedon Lippincott thrust his dagger into Roger Menwynnicke as he sat beside him in the pew in church; there was a Squire who dared not walk abroad for fear of his enemy who lurked behind the hedges with his sons, ready to attack him; there was the burning of the unauthorized mill by the monks; and a host of other things going on all over our peaceful countryside. And besides these everyday affairs, there were the great movements which swept over the whole country, from which no one could escape, the Civil Wars; the Peasants' Rebellions; the Harryings of Kings; and so on. There is no village without a history.

The length of the pageant depends a little on the comfort of the seats: if a feat of great physical endurance is demanded of the audience the pageant should be short; and even if the accommodation is reasonably comfortable the performance should not last much more than two hours. Fifteen minutes are necessary to



GROUP MOVEMENT: PRACTICE AT THE WIGMAN SCHOOL, BERLIN



make each scene intelligible, and therefore it is better to limit the number of episodes to four or five.

Two of the main problems of pageant-writing are *how to drive the meaning of the scene home*, and *how to link one scene with the next*.

In Greek Drama the method is simple, the action of the play is in the hands of the protagonists, and the comment is made by the chorus. The individual and the crowd were separate, and the Greek audience was satisfied.

Many pageant-writers have attempted to reproduce this, but with little success. The Chorus of Spirits, Father Time, or the Narrator are apt to bore the modern audience, which, being cinema-fed, can see but cannot listen. I remember a sigh behind me, "Oh, here come those dreadful people again!" as the lovely ladies of the chorus floated on, and it cured me of choruses.

As to the comment on the scene I have no doubt left in my mind about it. It should be conveyed by the scene itself in unmistakable terms, and the audience should be made to feel about it just what the author wishes it to feel. If it is real drama, the comment will be implicit; if it is not, a spate of blank verse will not help it. The scene should leave the audience caught up in the experience of a definite emotion.

I think that the best link between the episodes is music, possibly with the addition of choric dance. By music the feelings of the audience at the end of the scene are echoed, and by music they are modulated into the mood of the next. Music can make a greater, profounder, and more emotional comment than words, and it affords a greater contrast with the acted scene.

There is another possibility, however, which is worth

trying, in the introduction of comic relief between the episodes in the form of rough interludes, or burlesque mime or dancing. The value to the audience of such relief from serious or tragic subjects has been known since drama first began, but perhaps the best parallel is that of the slapstick farces which were played in France between the mysteries. For the dramatist it solves the problem of introducing comedy into scenes that do not lend themselves to it.

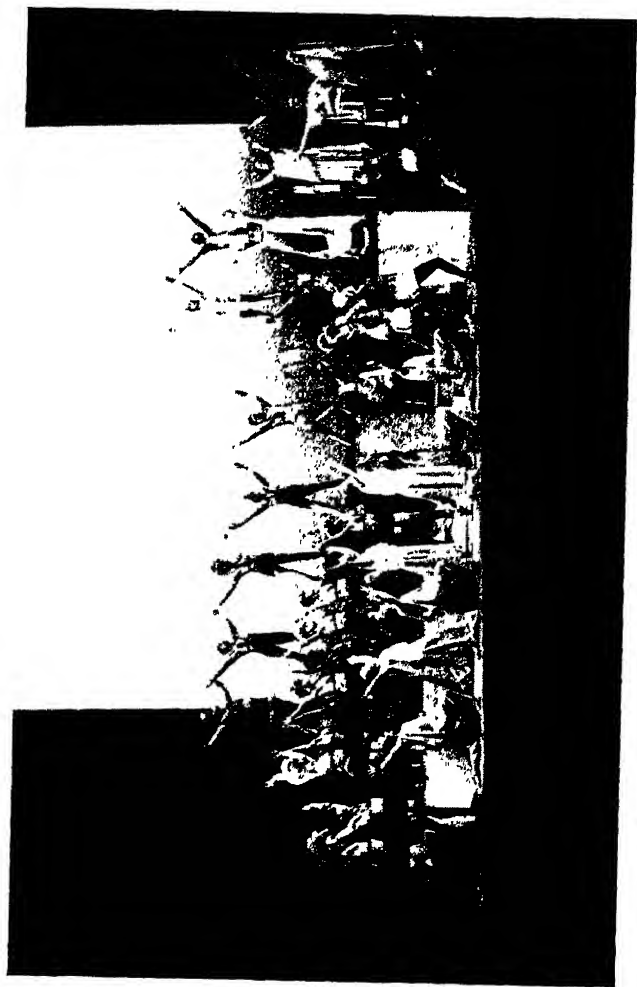
The linking of the episodes is not easy, for history is intractable stuff, and will give the lie to most theories; but if some definite idea runs through the whole it helps to make a unity of these separate events, and to interpret them to the audience. It is naturally better to space the episodes through time at pretty wide intervals, though the more obvious dramatic interest always tempts one to the days of strong action, the Middle Ages, Civil Wars, and so on.

I have been treating the historical pageant only, since that is the best known form, but there are, of course, many avenues for experimental work in the large-scale out-door play which might well be explored. Pageants of Industry, for example, could be organized in some co-operative way by the leading firms in each industry, and thus organized would have considerable value in several ways. They would bring before the workers in that industry the romance and larger interest that they can hardly realize in their own "daily round," and they would also present "Industry" to the public as something greater and more dignified than "Business." To do this, it must, of course, keep out the advertising slogan, for the sympathy of the public may be gained by a presentation of the industry as a whole,

but not by an advertisement of anyone's particular brand. How delightful a Pageant of Shoemakers would be! No dramatist would feel it beneath him to celebrate the Gentle Craft whose heart had once been won by Sim Eyre, and shoemakers do give plenty of opportunity, since they are so often men of humour, originality, and character, who have a considerable influence on the poor all round them. A Pageant of Silk Weavers would give a riot of colour and orientalism, and a Pageant of Miners suggests the dark, mysterious power that lies in the earth, and the life and death struggle between it and man. These all offer fine themes, worthy of good writing and production.

Again, this form is suited to the expression of religious and political ideas. The Tattoo is a childlike attempt to present the qualities of courage, discipline, and patriotism that belong to war, as well as its glitter, rhythm, and blare. It appeals to a primitive instinct, and gets a remarkable response. Equally, however, other ideas might be brought home very forcibly to large, unthinking multitudes, and Peace might get a hearing in the same way. Those who produce in unemployment centres could do fine things if they thought hard enough, for there are many ideas that are seething in men's minds now which do not need old castles, or costly dresses for their presentation. For these a disused mineshaft or a background of chimneys may well be the element required for the ground, and men and women in their working clothes, filled with the spirit of what they wish to express, will learn to make their meaning pretty clear in the hands of a capable producer.

Most of the elements of pageants are to be found in



GROUP MOVEMENT: HANDEL'S "EZIO" AT THE MUNICIPAL THEATRE, BERLIN

Greek Drama : the speech that springs from movement, the strongly-marked and stylized individual, the emotional reaction of the chorus, the large outdoor stage, the great size of the audience, and so on. Pageant-writers should always make a careful study of the Greek Theatre before writing, since so many of their problems were solved by the Greek dramatists thousands of years ago. But at the same time they should be able to deal with the same problems otherwise, if necessary, and to use different methods of getting their drama over where the conditions are different.

## CHAPTER VII

### PRODUCTION

A GREAT deal hangs on the choice of a Pageant-Master, and those Committees are ill-advised who economize on the fee, and get an inexperienced amateur to do the work for nothing. In the first place, it is heavy, and takes up the whole time of the Pageant-Master for several months, so that no Committee is justified in asking for so much without payment. In the second place, pageant production needs all the technical skill, knowledge of period and of crowd work that the professional can give, and more besides. There have been too many pageants in which inept production has followed on feeble writing and conception, and district after district has thrown away its history thus. The professional knows by instinct what are the essentials of the drama, and how to make them appear, how to make bricks with little straw, and how to salve an antiquarian's pageant. He or she knows, too, how to get the utmost from the hordes of untrained players, and the players feel that confidence that comes only from working with someone who knows his or her job.

It is not every professional producer, however, who can, or who will, undertake this work. Special qualities and a special kind of personality are needed: he must have a considerable gift of organization, the power to inspire people with enthusiasm, and a tactfully autocratic manner.

The crowds are large and untrained, of course—

but it must be remembered that they are also free agents, bound only by a promise, often exceedingly busy people, and that they are already sacrificing a great deal for their pageant. The producer, therefore, cannot afford to "throw his weight about," since that will lead only to a gradual evaporation of the crowd; but he can rely on an underlying local patriotism as the mainspring of the pageant. However big a name he has in the theatre, he will always matter less to the players than the home that they celebrate—and it is a fact that big names grow smaller as they recede from London. Generally speaking, the influence of the producer makes itself felt quite soon, and the result is a quickening interest and enthusiasm that grow in impetus to the final performance.

The Pageant-Master will want to work with big effects, and should not be hampered by having to train every unit of his crowd. He will, therefore, have under him a *sub-Producer in every episode*. For this post the best possible people are local experienced amateur producers, who work voluntarily. They are, of course, entirely under his command, and they stand to gain a great deal from working under an experienced man or woman of the theatre. The sub-producer can do much to help the Pageant-Master in the preparation of the scenes, and a part of the crowd work will be delegated to him. To begin with, he will know each member of his crowd, and recognize individual capabilities, so that he can use them in the right place. He will divide the crowd into groups, each under a *section-leader*, who will be responsible to him for the general movement of the group, as a collie to the shepherd. This method is by far the best, since the

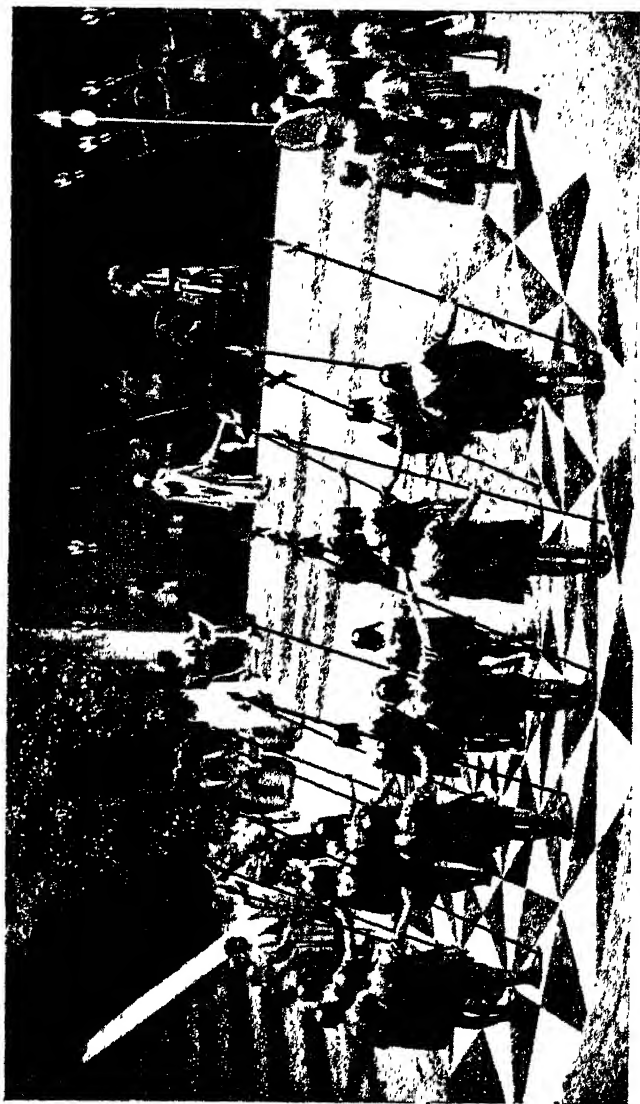
producer is closely in touch with one person, on whom he can rely for the working of the group, and in pageants for which only one rehearsal on the real stage is possible it prevents disintegration. These section-leaders must be reliable people and good actors—they have to work up the emotion in their groups, start a shout or a laugh, close or open or turn the group as required, and generally keep its tone up or down as the Pageant-Master wishes. If they are irregular or inattentive, they should be changed at once, for only reliable people are of any use at this job. They must always keep an eye on the producer, since through them he “conducts” his crowd. The sub-producer takes his whole crowd, or sections of it, frequently, and works at *the timing of all reaction*. This inevitably comes more slowly out of doors; the idea takes longer to reach the minds (especially at the edges of the crowd), sound seems to travel more slowly, the players are often inattentive and miss the moment, and so on. It is not easy to turn a number of half-interested, conversational, social acquaintances into a unit that has force and character. The sub-producer, therefore, has to get his crowd thoroughly to understand the scene first, and then to mould it into something that the Pageant-Master can use effectively when he rehearses. He can interest them with little difficulty if they feel that he expects real acting from them; what bores crowds is being treated as lay figures to fill up spaces and wear fancy dress. The local amateur producer will be far better as sub-producer than a professional who is quite outside the place; he knows his people and their capabilities, and they know him and are not afraid of him.

The sub-producer will have *every entrance and exit*,



*and all movements about the acting area, timed*, when he has had instructions from the Pageant-Master as to the pace required. He must know how long it will take for a funeral procession to go 300 yards, or a cavalier charge at full gallop half a mile, and the time any character will want to get from point to point on the stage. False calculations on these points cause serious trouble, for a character or a procession that is started late can never arrive at the dramatic moment, and thus the scene can easily be spoilt. Anything may happen—the crowd may miss its signal and be standing about chattering; the audience may have strayed across their way, and be obstructing them; the horses may be restive, and either jib or bolt; corpses may not be ready, and so on—the producer is never wholly free from anxiety about entrances on an outdoor stage. But if the sub-producer has had all these worked out, and has marked in the prompt book the moment when the signal should be given, the Pageant-Master will feel less nervous about them, and have a basis on which to work to his climaxes.

There is a good deal of timing that comes very little into theatre production, but on which many of the effects of outdoor work depend. There is this important point of *timing the passage of an idea or emotion* through the crowd. Now if the whole enormous crowd were to respond instantly to an idea sent out from the focal point, the audience would at once feel that they had been drilled; and, though the most careful drill is needed for everything that the crowd does, the audience must never guess it. Suppose that the idea emanates from a focal point, as in the Forum Scene in *Julius Caesar*, the emotion will spread outwards gradually.



SCENE FROM A GREEK PLAY AT BRADFELD

It has to pass out towards the edges of the crowd, and will, inevitably, in a large crowd, weaken as it goes. The fire of emotion is in the middle, which must be kept alive and moving, but the distant parts of the crowd will only have a reflection of the fire at first. The Pageant-Master has to get this passing out of the idea carefully worked, and much time has to be spent on it at rehearsal. Again, an idea may come in gradually, from outside, and may move slowly and almost imperceptibly round the crowd, as in the scene in *Elizabeth of England*, when the news of the defeat of the Armada was brought to Philip of Spain. The King was at Mass, kneeling before the high altar: a messenger entered down stage, and whispered to a kneeling figure close to him—this figure turned with a face of consternation to hear more, and then passed on the message. The news crept like a snake round among the figures until the audience was keyed up to know the effect on the King when it reached him. The size of the crowd will regulate the timing to some extent. The first growth of an idea will be much slower in a large crowd than in a small, since it has farther to go and is more dispersed. On the other hand, a large crowd that has once grasped an idea will act more swiftly, the decision flaring up amongst them like fire in straw, whereas a small crowd has to gather courage and confidence before it does anything. The audience has the whole crowd in view; there can be no suggestion of an army by a few men passing a window, or any such device. There they all are, and everyone can see them! A feeble producer will not be able to keep his crowd properly keyed up and entirely in the scene; there will be many dead spots, and many inattentive people who

can damage the scene very badly indeed. The Pageant-Master must be able to inspire his whole crowd so strongly with the idea that each individual becomes caught up in it.

The rhythm of emotion, too, has much greater chance than it can ever get in a theatre—the movement towards or away from the compelling idea, the breaking, the uniting, scattering, change of *tempo*, and so on. All this rhythm is so strong on the big acting area and with a large number of people that it inevitably has some relation to dance-drama on a big scale, and it is in this side of pageant work that the Laban Movement would prove a valuable asset. It would be extremely interesting to see real experimental work in this direction, and, indeed, in the whole matter of crowd production on a large scale, for the crowd is a magnificent instrument in the hands of a good producer.

What I have said about *the principals* in the book applies equally to them in production. They must be *emphasized* in every possible way and great stress laid upon them. This will be done in many ways—the character may be mounted; his dress will be strongly contrasted with that of the rest; his make-up will be clearly defined; and his gesture and movement will be strong and well characterized. It will be necessary, too, for him to have a good carrying voice, and if he is mounted to have his horse in perfect control. Principal speaking parts should never be numerous, but in every scene there will always be a number of Important Personages that are not principals in the dramatic sense, but that satisfy those who want a prominent position and a smart dress, and who act so badly that they cannot be used in the crowd. As the principals

will usually be historical characters, both producer and actor should read up about them to discover the characteristics and habits that the well-informed part of the audience will recognize. Such people as King Charles II, Dr. Johnson, or Lord Beaconsfield should be unmistakable directly they appear.

Unlike babies and some of the domestic animals on whose actions no one can rely, *horses* are a real asset to the producer. A character that is mounted is raised to a different level from the crowd, and gains emphasis at once; if he is a good horseman, he and his horse are one, and you get a larger unit. The horse is so sensitive to his rider that he appears to act with him, and, after several rehearsals, is actually ready for his movements. The man gains dignity, and no good rider is ever ungraceful on his horse. One hand is occupied with the reins, of course, but he need never feel the embarrassment of not knowing what to do with his hands. Again, he has greater variety of pace in movement than if he were on foot. When a number of characters are mounted, you get an underlying rhythm from the horses themselves, and from the sway of the riders' bodies; the audience will always be thrilled by the sweep of a gallop or the measured movement of a triumphant army—whether the humans get their drama over or not, the horses always will. One essential thing about scenes played on horseback is that *they should always be rehearsed on horseback*, and, if possible, on the same horses. The Committee does not always realize this, but the Pageant-Master should insist.

*Composition* is on a large scale, and the Pageant-Master has to learn to think in mass; he has a big space to use, and the bigger the space, the smaller the human

figure appears, and the larger the numbers required to fill it. But unless he has a feeling for composition, his large crowd will be of little value, and will appear to the audience only as a lot of people in a field. It is impossible here to go into the whole subject of composition—and indeed it would be difficult to lay down the law on a matter which depends so very much on varying circumstances—but there are one or two main problems. The auditorium is very large in proportion to the stage, and it is necessary to keep the whole audience in touch with the focal point of the drama, or else the dramatic contact will be lost. The tendency, unless the stage offers some natural feature that will make for variety, is to keep this focal point in the centre every time, and then it is difficult to keep the ends of the crowd from curling so far round the action as to hide it from the audience. The effect of focusing the crowd on the action without actually masking it is not easily got, but in this, different levels on the stage will help. This should be borne in mind when choosing the site, for it is often possible, by shifting it a little, to include a rise in the ground, a wall, or a flight of steps, any one of which will give the producer opportunities for variety in composition. The illustration of the stage used for *The Tempest* at Porthcurno in Cornwall shows a wise use of natural levels, and in the old chalk-pit which served for a theatre at Lancing College, the same play was given on a series of small natural stages at different levels.

On these large stages *acting* must also be large in scale, movements must be strong, free, and definite, and every player must remember that it is his body which has got to speak, first and all the time. Whether

he has any lines or not, he has to get the utmost power of expression out of his body, and that is not easy for English adults, who are unaccustomed to use gesture in ordinary life, and who indulge in strong movement only when they are playing games. It is interesting to see the swiftness of movement used in the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park; the long entrances and exits and the big spaces on the stage are all traversed very rapidly, and the action of the play is kept alive in this way.

If dialogue is used, it needs careful attention from the producer, for few of the players can speak easily out of doors, and the effect of their ordinary speech is that of a "muted" violin. The pace must be slower than it would be on an indoor stage, and the pauses longer, because sound travels more slowly out of doors, but it must on no account seem slower to the audience; emphasis must be stronger, and a real power of declamation will often be needed. Countrymen, who work out of doors, and are accustomed to shout to their horses, or to converse across fields, will find it easier to make their voices carry than townsmen, whose voices are often thin; but it is always difficult to get a good effect from one woman's voice, unless she has been well trained. I cannot advocate the use of amplifiers for ordinary dialogue, for, in my opinion, they distort the voice and destroy its personality; but they are of value when announcements have to be made to the audience, or in speaking a prologue or other explanatory matter.

Most pageants are played in full daylight, but one or two—notably the Greenwich Pageant—have been played at night by floodlighting, and floodlighting is also used very effectively in the Tattoo. All sorts of



STAGE FOR "THE TEMPEST"; PORTICURNO, CORNWALL.



illusions can be given in this way, and on a very big scale; there are excellent possibilities of experiment here. In the Regent's Park theatre the waning daylight is so subtly replaced by artificial light that the audience is hardly aware when one ends and the other begins. On a small stage torches can be most effective; carried by the players, they can be massed anywhere, and their flickering light and smoky shadows give the whole scene a pleasantly fantastic appearance. They can be bought quite cheaply from C. T. Brock & Co.'s "Crystal Palace" Fireworks, Ltd., and will last for several hours.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE STAGE AND THE AUDITORIUM

THE site should be chosen early by the Author, the Pageant-Master, and the Grounds Committee, for there are several important points in connexion with it that may take time in the consideration. We have seen how the site will affect the author, and how important it is that he should have a voice in the choosing of it—we must now see how it affects the production and the organization. It is by no means easy to be sure of a site that will be equally good all round, and one consideration has often to give way before another. Somehow or other the public has to see and hear the pageant easily, to be given every comfort possible while seeing it, to be able to reach it and get away without difficulty, and generally to enjoy it. Besides this, the arrangements behind the scenes and on the stage must be such that the pageant can be played as well as possible, and that the players are not hampered by lack of organization.

Since I have already laid some stress on the value of dialogue in a pageant, and since it is quite possible to find stages on which dialogue can be heard with ease, it is worth while considering the acoustic properties of any suggested site first. The Greeks and Romans understood a good deal about outdoor acoustics, and Vitruvius, a Roman writer, has given some interesting information on the subject, which is quoted in *The Open Air Theatre*, by Sheldon Cheney. In America a large number of outdoor plays are performed, and it is

quite usual to erect outdoor theatres on the classic plan; for our pageants in this country, however, we rarely construct artificial stages, but prefer to use the natural surroundings as far as possible, and experience has shown that these have certain advantages and also disadvantages that must be considered in choosing the site.

Trees, for example, form a beautiful background, and as such will send the voices forward; at the sides they will be useful in enclosing the stage picture, or masking entrances, or in throwing across the stage pleasant shadows that contrast with the strong sunlight; but on the stage they are dangerous, for they swallow up the sound, and in a high wind will make such a noise that the players will not get a hearing.

Backgrounds of hills, or of gently rising ground, or of masonry, or of a hanging wood, will all make good sounding boards, and the voices will also be carried forward by a dip in the ground between them and the audience, or, better still, by water. If there is a chance to get a quiet stream or still pond well down stage, it should be seized.

Rain and wind are always enemies, rain being the worse, for even if the players brave the wetness of the rain, they cannot push their voices through it.

The stand, especially if it is covered, will catch and concentrate the sound, so that the general audibility becomes considerably greater directly it has been erected.

The comparative levels of actors and audience were carefully studied in Greek and Roman theatres, and the best form of natural stage does, in reality, approximate to the later Greek and the Roman: that is, the

actors at the focal point will be on a level with the third or fourth row of the audience, while the ground will fall away a little between, and the rest of the auditorium will rise above the stage. If the actors are too high above the audience there is a danger that the voices will mount and disperse, so that it is always important to raise the auditorium, even if a good natural platform has been found. In the Hearst Greek Theatre in America an audience of ten thousand can hear every word spoken in conversational tones on the stage.

This country abounds in such ancient grassy amphitheatres as Maiden Castle or Pirran Round, and these offer ideal conditions for outdoor production, except for the fact that they are often exposed to the winds. The bailey of an old castle is also excellent, because of its form, and the amphitheatre can be made there. If it is possible to find a site that has this shape it is always better to use it than to take something with a wide background, since it is not only better for audibility but for visibility as well. All the seats are equidistant from the focal point, so that everyone can see and hear equally well, and the attention of the whole audience is drawn to that point, so that it is not likely to see anything beyond it unless the producer wishes it to do so.

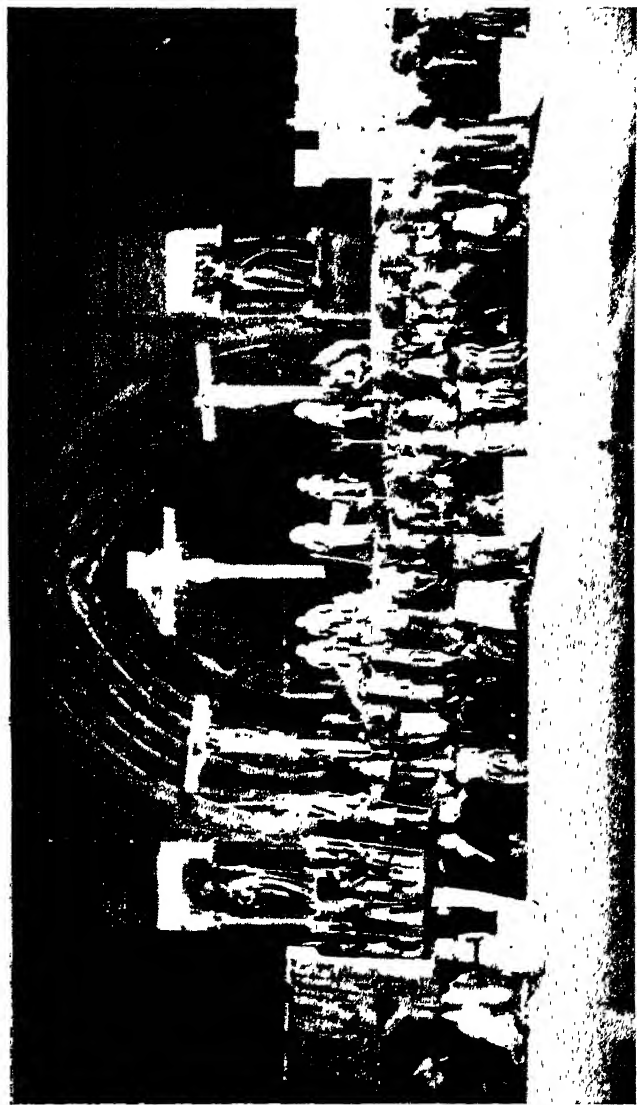
If no natural amphitheatre is to be had, then it is important to build the stand as a section of a circle, and, though this may be more costly, the expense is fully justified, since each day's audience is satisfied and goes away saying so, and therefore swelling the next day's. In a long, straight stand the people on the outer edges get out of touch with the dramatic focus, and they do not hear easily; they then begin to talk or laugh, which makes it impossible for their neighbours to hear,

so that the talking spreads inwards and the illusion is lost.

A remarkable presentation of a fifteenth century mystery play *le Vray Mistere de la Passion*, by Arnoul Grebak, was given before the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris in 1935, to an audience of 20,000; in this stage sets were used, which were as wide as the façade of the Cathedral itself, while the background of the real building was floodlit at special moments with a wonderful effect. At Canterbury, too, the south door of the Cathedral formed the background of Mr. Nugent Monck's production of *Everyman*, and lent itself admirably to this form of medieval drama.

During the past five years there has been a great revival of outdoor plays in France, largely inspired by Pierre Adelbert; the old Roman theatres, which are to be found in so many places in that country, have been brought into use once more.

The entrances are seldom entirely satisfactory, and some sort of screening has to be used here and there. This should be done carefully, under the Pageant-Master, so that it does not stick out from the general colour of the background. If hessian is used it should be dyed green to tone in with the foliage and grass; if hurdles and brushwood, the brushwood must be fresh, and not withered and brown. All screening must be high enough to hide a horse and his rider, including weapons, and it must be fixed firmly, or jostling crowds or restive horses may bring it down. The Pageant-Master may want architectural screening in the form of canvas buildings, walls, gatehouses, etc. It is not wise to use much of this, since it is hard to get the right illusion out of doors, but a skilful scene-painter, working on the



THE CRUCIFIXION IN "LE VRAY MISTERE DE LA PASSION": NOTRE-DAME, PARIS

ground itself, can succeed in blending them in with the real. In one pageant a number of black-and-white Tudor dwellings were placed at the foot of a castle wall of stone; the contrast between the timber and plaster and the stone prevented comparison, and the effect was quite convincing. A wise plan is to place these buildings in the shade of trees, where the trees themselves will help to make them one with the setting, and will tone down the general effect. They must be built in the round, with apparent thickness, and with roofs; but it is not necessary to be too realistic about them, and one gateway, well placed, will give quite enough suggestion of an abbey or a castle for any audience. A building, conveying a definite idea, gives a kind of focus to some part of the stage, and it is possible to get an effect of changing the scene if the focus is shifted from one part to another, as is exemplified in the "houses" at Oberammergau.

"Prompt corners" have to be found somehow, and they must not be corners at all, but close in among the players. Prompting is sometimes done by megaphone or microphone from the front of the stand, but this may be heard by the audience, which is inexcusable. Probably the best method is to use peripatetic prompters, who keep close to the principals with books hidden in their props, but the Bedfordshire W.I. Pageant Committee dug a grave for their prompter down stage, with a little grass mound to hide him from the audience. It was quite a comfortable little grave, but I had the feeling, when I saw it, that unless it were carefully fenced from horses it might become a grave indeed!

When once the matter of the stage and the entrances and exits has been settled, an exact plan should be

made of it, showing everything that may concern the production. Copies of this plan will be sent to every sub-producer, who will mark it out, with a tennis marker, in the field that he is to use for rehearsal stage. The players in each episode will then rehearse on exactly the same space as they will find for their performance, and all the grouping will fall into place automatically. A rehearsal stage should also be marked near the place where the pageant is to be held, for if all rehearsals are held on the pageant ground itself, there will not be a blade of grass left for the performance, and there may be a morass. The Grounds Committee must watch the actual ground carefully throughout the rehearsals, and do their best to keep it in good condition. Usually it is necessary to hold preliminary rehearsals on the real stage, but when the effect of the ground and surroundings is thoroughly realized, the transfer to the rehearsal stage should be made.

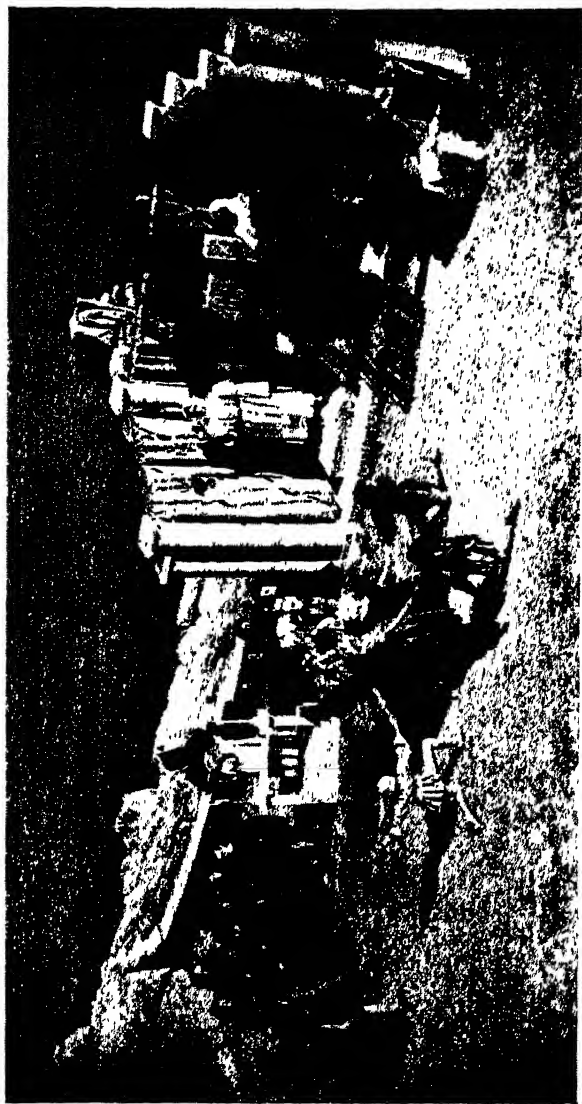
To return to the auditorium. The Pageant Committee must face the fact, from the beginning, that a raised and covered stand is necessary, and that its cost is one of the essential expenses of the pageant. Apart from the artistic advantages already mentioned, it is sound finance, for unless the audience is made thoroughly happy and comfortable on the first day, and can see and hear with ease, and does not get wet or cold, it will go away cross, and nothing can damage a pageant more than a cross audience on the first day. It is well to advertise the Raised and Covered Stand, as the public is inclined to be a little suspicious of pageant arrangements, and likes to know that it will be kept dry and be able to see when it has paid for its seat. The stand should not face into the sun, and its sides should



be closed against a driving wind, and it should have plenty of easy entrances. The audience at Oberammergau, four thousand in number, is out of the theatre in two minutes, and this may as easily be achieved in any outdoor auditorium in England. The stand must be put up by a firm used to the work—this is not a job for amateurs—and it must be inspected by an official of the Board of Trade. The Grounds Committee will have to reckon carefully the amount of seating capacity in any given space, and send in an estimate of the amount to the Finance Committee before any site is finally chosen; sometimes by shifting the position of the stand a little, a larger number can be seated, and the possible seating capacity must be reckoned against the general cost of the pageant. There are various methods of getting timber for stands, but even for a village pageant with a small stand it is difficult to get one for less than £60.

The car park should be as near as possible to the stand, and organized efficiently, for long delays in getting in and out are a bad advertisement for the pageant.

The Grounds Committee must be men of determination and authority, for they must be prepared to deal with undisciplined crowds. Some lawless spirit is evoked by a pageant in the audience, and it behaves as other audiences do not. It is strangely determined to come on to the stage, and ropes are of no account in its eyes; it likes to have picnics on the stage, to climb up into the trees, to sit on the walls and towers, and generally to be where it is not meant to be. Aged ladies will make a slow progress right across the stage, from some unknown spot to their seat, just as King Arthur



THE JACKDAW OF RHEIMS: PORTHCURNO, CORNWALL

and his Knights with all their following are making an imposing entrance through the Castle gate; a charabanc load of the Historical Society will examine the foundations of the Abbey, and even give short lectures on some interesting feature when the Spirit of the Ages is taking breath for her blank verse harangue, and the Press photographer, in all his horror, dodges about among the horses' heels to take snaps of Lady —— as Margaret of Anjou! So not only must the Grounds Committee make strong fences, but they must recruit a good staff of strong men for the performances.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ORGANIZATION

THE organization of any pageant, however small, is half, or even two-thirds, of the battle, and it is well to consider carefully how this should be done. There will be the Central Committee, with its sub-committees, and there will be the separate organization of each episode: all must work in harmony if success is to be attained. The whole responsibility for the pageant, both artistic and financial, rests on the Central Committee, and its work must be taken in hand very seriously, and by the right people. A pageant is a big financial venture, and entails a good deal of risk; it is going to ask for a large amount of work and enthusiasm from hundreds of people, and it caters for the entertainment of an even larger number. The Central Committee should therefore consist not of the social climbers and persons of quality who so often stand at the back of pageants, but of a just proportion of artists and of sound business men. The Quality and the climbers should be patrons and guarantors, or even actors, and their names have a real publicity value, but if the Committee is made of these the undertaking will be of as much value as a Society *matinée*, and an exasperation which may take many years to soothe may be left among the humbler workers who have given freely of their time and brains.

The most important person of all is the Secretary, and he, or she, must be an exceptional person! He will get all the kicks, and hear all the grievances, his work

will be both endless and exasperating, he will be expected to deal with every emergency, and all the bouquets will go to the Author, the Producer, and the Principals; yet, unquestionably, the final success of the pageant will be due to his unfailing tact and ingenuity. Without him the Producer would have no material to work on, the various parts of the organization would be at sixes and sevens, and the morale of the cast would go to pieces. Everyone must feel that the Secretary is confident of success, that he can fend off all depressions, that nothing is a worry, and that all things are possible to him. He has to recruit players and workers of all kinds from a large district, to put the right person in the right place, and to replace those who fall out—in short, to keep all the wheels oiled, and the machine running smoothly. Everyone should realize at the outset that he has the biggest job in the whole thing, and be ready to help him with goodwill and efficiency.

Assuming that each episode is to have its own complete organization it should not be necessary to set up a number of central sub-committees, but the following are necessary: Finance, Production, and Grounds.

The Finance Committee should be small and entirely competent, containing at least one mind that can think on a large scale. It has to receive and consider estimates from all the departments, to point out wise methods of economy, and decide on a right expenditure. A pageant may be spoilt by a meanness that destroys the artistic effect, but quite often money is spent on unnecessary things, and a financial failure results.

It has first to raise a fund to carry on the initial work, either as a Guarantee Fund or in the form of subscriptions or donations, and this is undoubtedly far easier when

the names of the Finance Committee are those of sound business people. It will, after considering estimates, allot a certain amount to each episode, which should not be exceeded. The major costs of a pageant are—

Author's Fee.

Pageant-Master's Fee.

Secretary's Salary.

Printing and Publicity.

Costumes and Properties.

The Stand.

Transport of Players.

Music.

Fencing, Tents, and Screening.

Individual Pageant-Committees may effect considerable economies on some of these, from their local conditions, but for most these expenses must be considered first, and on some economy is unwise.

An adequate fee should be paid to the Author for his work; and it should be realized that this must be paid when the book is complete, whether the pageant is ever performed or not. He may ask a percentage royalty on performances as well, but the time and work that he has spent on research and the study of local history must be paid for, and since he has written a play that must be, in its very nature, purely local, it can never be performed elsewhere, and he can look for no further royalties on it.

I have said enough on the technical side of production to make it clear that only experienced producers ought to tackle pageants, and therefore the Committee must be prepared to pay a just fee to the Pageant-Master. No good producer will abandon the chance of

a professional engagement to produce a pageant in the country with an amateur cast unless the fee is adequate; the kudos that he gets from it is negligible in the profession, and the experience of handling large crowds of untrained players is valuable only to those who specialize in pageant work. A wise choice of Producer is all-important, and advice on this subject may be had from the British Drama League (9 Fitzroy Square, W.1) which has a panel of producers, pageant-writers, and organizers.

A third essential salary is that of the Secretary. The Committee needs his whole time and his whole personality, and a small car will also be necessary if the episode groups are widely scattered. Other office salaries may also be needed if the undertaking is a big one.

It is also an economy to employ a skilled Publicity Agent, for while this part of the work may be wastefully done by those who do not understand it, it should certainly repay itself if conducted by an expert.

The Production Committee consists of the staff of the Pageant-Master, and is under his control. The following officers are needed—

Stage Manager.

Mistress of the Robes.

Property-Master.

Master of the Music.

Master of the Horse.

*The Pageant-Master* will discuss each episode with these; and lists of requirements and general ideas will be written down. Each will then get into touch with the similar officers of each episode, and go into the detail of

the work and the best methods of carrying it out. They will give the individual workers as much scope for originality as possible, but must be ready to advise in any emergency, and supply information that these cannot get. They will visit the staff of each episode early, and give them a talk on the costume, music, properties, etc., of the period; they will discuss estimates and advise on methods of economy, and generally start them off. Later on they will come round again to see how the work is going, and to explain the methods of organization that will be used behind the scenes. Time is of the utmost importance in all this work, and last-minute rushes are invariably costly.

*The Mistress of the Robes* will get out the general designs for the scene, will order material and dyes in bulk, and will supply patterns and designs if required; if the costumes are to be hired she will get estimates from the different firms, and see the costumes before booking.

*The Master of the Music* will choose the music to be performed, and will instruct the episode musicians as to its performance; he will also be responsible for supplying the incidental music.

*The Master of the Horse* will get into touch with the Grounds Committee about the stabling of the horses during the pageant, will be responsible for finding enough horses, and for their care during performances.

It is unnecessary to detail all the functions of each officer, but I have indicated the general method of carrying out the work.

The Grounds Committee is responsible for the stand, the fencing and screening, tents and car parks. It has to keep the acting area in good condition, to



provide a rehearsal stage, and house the orchestra or the wireless.

#### EPISODE ORGANIZATION

Each episode will have the same officers as the Central Production Committee, and a Secretary as well. The Secretary will recruit for the cast in his scene, and will keep a careful record of it; he will issue as early as possible a schedule of rehearsals, and bring all his influence to bear on the cast to make them understand that it is necessary for all of them to attend every rehearsal, that substitutes are useless, and that subsequent engagements must not interfere with rehearsal nights. That is no mean task in itself! He will arrange for the transport of the players, getting as many as possible taken free, and he has to be able to hand over his whole scene, in perfect condition and good order, at the end.

The duties of the Sub-Producer have been described under "Production," and those of the Stage Manager are too well known to need enumeration.

The Master of the Music has to get the music allotted to him performed, and that is often a difficult thing in a village. The Pipes and Pipe-playing of Miss Margaret James (Edgeworth, Gloucestershire) are a godsend for outdoor work, and in scenes where pipes are really needed. The Master has to train the singers, and find the best means of making horn or trumpet sounds, etc.

The Master of the Horse should find all the horses necessary for his episode, and look after them. He should remember that for all early periods cart-horses should be used rather than hunters, though the latter will be wanted for swift movements, as in cavalier

charges. Pageants are held in the summer, when horses are out to grass and therefore quiet, but it is important that they should rehearse every time to get used to the players, and that they should wear strange trappings early.

The Property-Master will get his instructions from the Head "Props," and will then collect workers and a workshop. He will want a carpenter's bench and some trestle tables, and he will want someone to teach papier-mâché work, as well as carpenters. His material should not be costly—three-ply wood, beaverboard, paper and paste, some poles, string and rope, size, glue, nails, and paint should make most of what is needed, provided that he has a good supply of "ingenuity and artifice." Substitute props, as near as possible in size to the real ones, should be supplied to the players quite early, and the real ones kept until the end. The period should be carefully studied, and good, simple, big designs made for all props, finicky things being almost invisible on a large stage. Real antiques may be borrowed, but they must be insured, and they need so much care that everyone will be much happier with fakes; besides, fakes often look more real than the real. The Property-Master must be prepared for carelessness on the part of the players; he should keep all props in his shop, give them out when needed, and take them back afterwards, both at rehearsals and at performances.

The Wardrobe Mistress, like the Property-Master, has an interesting job, and one that gives scope for real artistry and originality. If costumes are to be made she will need a staff of dressmakers, cutters, dyers, stencillers, dressers, and makers-up; if they are to be hired, she will need the last two only, but everyone

concerned must study the period in detail, and know just how the clothes of the time were made, and how they were worn. She will want a good workroom, one or two machines, and some trestle tables; also a wash-house for dyeing in, some large zinc baths or a copper, and a shady place to dry the dyed goods. In the workroom she will stretch a clothes-line along each wall, on which the costumes will hang, each on its separate hanger. The hanger will be marked with the name of the character, and a bag for spare parts will hang from it; when the costume is complete it will be ready to go, with the hanger, to the pageant dressing-rooms. Having submitted her designs to the Mistress of the Robes, she will then send forth her workers to beg or to borrow old curtains, sheets, bedspreads, uniforms, etc., from their friends, and, having studied their period well, they will go out with a searching eye and a persuasive tongue. The Wardrobe Mistress will make a list of all the characters directly they are cast, and will at once take all their measurements in detail. She will then start a book, in which each character is noted, with measurements, details of costume, wig, weapons, etc., and will check off each item as she completes it or is given it. She, like the Property-Master, must keep a lynx eye on the players, checking each costume as she gives it out and as she gets it back; she must urge on all of them, with the utmost stringency, the *need for taking care of the costumes*. The oftener the costumes are worn before the dress rehearsal the better; even if all the spare parts are not ready, the costumes lose the dreadful new look, and the players get used to putting them on and off, and to moving in them. If all this is done early everything will go astonishingly

smoothly on the day, and the clothes will seem to belong to the people, but still the Wardrobe Mistress and her staff must be prepared to act as dressers during the performances.

Naturally, every pageant has its own special conditions, and a great deal of voluntary work will be needed in every section. An appeal for this should be got out early, giving the various jobs for which workers will be needed, and it is as well to hint, even in this appeal, that no one has any use for "the ungodly," who "promiseth but doth not perform." But the Committee must be sure that it does not ask for unlimited work from busy people, and at the same time pay salaries that are not fully earned—a not unheard-of occurrence! If the public has confidence in its Committee it will work for it, and will find the work varied and interesting; the more people are engaged in helping it on in one way or another, the greater is the enjoyment, and the sense of achievement at the end.

## CHAPTER X

### THE CAST

AN early start should be made in recruiting for players and workers, and it is advisable to have ready some kind of synopsis of the pageant when doing this, in order to interest people. With this, the Secretary may ask to address the meetings of various organizations in order to get support from them, and, if he has a power of description, he should be able to give them an idea of what the pageant will finally become. The best supporters of any pageant are always found in societies that are working with some social or artistic aim, and are already a community—local amateur dramatic societies, Women's Institutes, British Legion, young people's organizations, and so on. If any such body undertakes an episode, it has within itself a spirit of co-operation and of team work that is infinitely valuable to the organizers. Moreover, it knows how to use this work to the benefit of its members by getting the utmost out of it educationally and artistically. If the first approach is made to individuals there is nothing to hold them together until the interest of the thing has gripped them, and it takes some little time to make a real cement of this interest. Any organization that is asked to take an episode will feel a pride in making it as good as possible, for the honour of the club or company, or whatever it may be, and a friendly rivalry will arise between the episodes. It will recruit players from outside its own membership if large crowds are

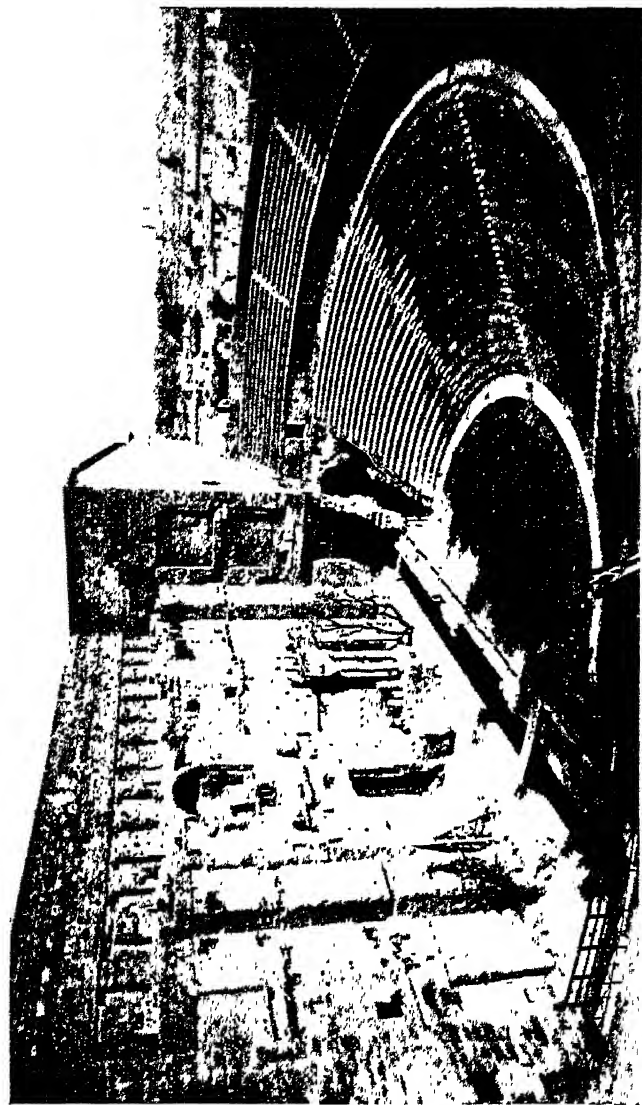
needed, but the episode will appear under its name, and it will do the necessary spade work. Incidentally, it will probably add to its membership from among the individuals whom it has drawn in, for many firm friendships are made in pageant-acting. One of the best groups with which I ever worked was the Hampshire Hunt, which took over a Saxon hunting scene. They were already friends in the hunting-field, which made for a delightful spirit among them, but more than that, they spared no pains in the rehearsal and general perfection of their scene, and performed it as artists. Since then I have always asked for the help of the local Hunts, and have always found them to contain not only people who could ride, and who lost all self-consciousness while on horseback, but people who could really act as well.

The prospective players should meet the Pageant-Master as soon as possible in order that he may talk to them about the pageant and about what he expects of them. He has an opportunity here that he should not miss. His crowd will be enormous, and, mostly untrained, they will have little idea of what the pageant is going to be, of what they can do in competent hands, or even of what acting and the discipline of acting really are. He can at once make them feel that they have powers, and impress on them that only sound work will enable them to use their powers; he can make them feel that they will enjoy their work, and achieve something really fine; and he can make them respect and like him, which is extremely important. When this personal contact has been made, the Secretary's recruiting work will be easier, for people will know what is expected of them.

The main rehearsals, taken by the Pageant-Master, together with the dress parade, and performances, should be fixed at an early stage. The Secretary should then have a duplicated paper which he can put into the hands of every performer, giving these, and certain necessary conditions. If it has a slip at the bottom, which the performer fills in with his name and address it will supply a record for his office. Later, but not much later, a further list of rehearsals will be issued by the episode sub-producer. With these precautions, there will be no excuse at all for players who say, "Oh, you never told me the rehearsal was on Wednesday!" or "Of course I can't manage *that* week, my dear, I simply must go to Paris just then!"

Rehearsals will, of course, be in the evening to suit those who are at work during the day, and they should begin with absolute punctuality, even if only a few are there. If the producer waits for principals, and they know he will do so, they will be later and later each time, and the crowd will get exasperated, and drop off. If the principals are avoidably late, it is well for them to see that understudies are being rehearsed in their parts; they will be punctual in future!

The cast is not easy to handle for a good many reasons, and the whole organization must be prepared for this. It is composed mainly of people who do not know anything of the necessary discipline of a production; they have no idea of the time that it takes to work at any point or to study a part; they have, perhaps, never used their imaginations very much, and all this has to be made clear to them. To begin with, they are quite casual about punctuality at rehearsals, or even about attendance, and when they do attend



ROMAN THEATRE AT ORANGE



they feel that it is a social function, and that they can talk freely. Sooner or later the Pageant-Master will have to deal with them and to give them "a piece of his mind." Once should be enough, and the Pageant-Master will know when to apply this tonic; afterwards he will get their attention, and can begin to awaken their imagination and power of expression. He has to make them understand that everything that every single person does, while anywhere on the acting area, counts; and he must repeat this many times during rehearsal time. Unless the players get this well into their heads, and really do come right into the scene, the temptation to look off the stage into the auditorium will be too much for them on the day and they will shirk the discipline.

Village players are the best possible crowds. They are entirely unself-conscious, and can throw themselves into a scene with real abandonment. The mere fact of being in a crowd is so unusual for them that it excites them, and they give the utmost attention to their producer. In recruiting, it should be made clear that the crowd work is important, and that the best players are needed for this, quite as much as for the principal parts. No one should feel that a part in a crowd is a small thing, and that it does not matter whether he attends rehearsals or not. I once heard two ladies discussing a pageant. One said that she would like to be in the crowd, but that she couldn't manage the rehearsals! Her friend replied, "Ah, *that* doesn't matter at all! We all have substitutes, and one goes one day and one another!" Which was enlightening.

Village players are also better able to speak and to

move out of doors than townsmen, and as the men can usually ride they are valuable material.

Type casting is almost inevitable for the principals, since they have so often to represent well-known historical characters; but it is essential that they should be able to act as well. In the familiar Queen Elizabeth scene, it is disappointing to see an Elizabeth who looks the part to perfection as she is carried in in her litter, but who roars as gently as any sucking dove when she has to act. They must have good carrying voices, they must have a "presence," and often they must also ride. Now it is usual, as a matter of compliment, to cast the "County" in the parts of Kings, Queens, and great figures of history, because they have the manner of the aristocracy, but it is a dangerous practice. The manner of the aristocracy, or of Society, to-day, is not that of past days, and, speaking generally, they cannot assume any other manner. The speech of history more nearly resembled our country dialects than the thin flat tongue of the lady or the gentleman to-day, and there is often a greater dignity in a farmer than in a modern peer. Even for types, it is better to be quite indiscriminating about class, and to make for the real thing, and it is always better to have people who can assume the right character than those who merely resemble it. The best place for the County is in the representation of its ancestors. They will be happy in such parts, and can carry them off; they can wear lovely clothes and heraldry, and so on, and feel themselves as important as the principals. The unpunctuality at rehearsals, caused by the sacred nature of the dinner-hour, or by late tennis parties, will matter less to the producer in such parts than in any others. Their inclusion in the

cast has a definite value, as many more people will join in if they feel that they will be mixing with Countesses, or even Honourables, and it has Press value, but it is well only to put them in parts where defection does not matter.

Understudies will be found, as rehearsals proceed, from among the keenest and most talented of the crowd. Having attended rehearsals regularly, they will know the geography of the scene, and be pretty well aware of what the producer wants, so that they can step into principal parts easily. If possible, they should be allowed to play the part during one performance at least.

Children are always needed, and, well handled, are a gift to the producer. They do not distract the audience as they do on an indoor stage, but they add greatly to the beauty of the effect, and are also capable of strong emotional acting. There is no need to put them always into pretty-pretty parts, for their imagination is strong, and they can express such emotions as fear and sorrow very poignantly. If gaiety is needed, they will add to it tenfold. The schools from which they are drawn should be chosen carefully, for the pageant reveals the particular character of the school remarkably. Generally speaking, the elementary schools will give a freer, more vigorous, performance than the higher grade, as the repression of emotion that is the creed of the upper classes always affects pupils of these schools in any artistic work. But here and there are schools in which the drama is practised regularly and under good producers, and these will certainly contribute a great deal. The main trouble lies in examinations, which seem to take place all through the summer.

A Pageant-Master is sometimes lucky enough to get soldiers, though the danger with these is that military duties may interfere with rehearsals without notice. Soldiers are invaluable not only as the military of any period, but in many other parts. They know how to wear costume, how to move, and how to speak loudly and do what they are told. More than that, they throw themselves into a scene with hearty enjoyment, and really let themselves go over crowd work.

Dogs, too, delight an audience, but being more concerned with their own affairs, they do not act as well as horses. The jealousy that exists among amateurs is nothing compared to the jealousy among dog players, and the latter give freer rein to its expression. Certain dogs belong to certain periods, and should not be used out of it; foxhounds, for instance, were not used in Shakespeare's day, though deerhounds and wolfhounds would be in the picture. In a scene of a period when wolves did exist in England, wolfhounds would be essential, and sometimes these can be had, for advertisement in the programme, from special kennels. In medieval scenes, small greyhounds led by the ladies or the pages are charming decoration, and the species that can only be called "Dog" is seen in most medieval pictures. Spaniels, from the "King Charles" in the Restoration scenes, to newer breeds for any modern scene, can be introduced, but care should be taken not to use completely modern types. Avoid friction among dog players by keeping them on a leash.

Discipline is so important that it is impossible to overestimate it, and yet it must be, to some extent, veiled. There is one curious thing common to all pageant-players—they are determined to see the show as well

as to act in it. This they must not be allowed to do during its performance, though they should be encouraged to watch rehearsals. It must be told them over and over again, it must be written in their paper, and posted up as notices, that *no player must be seen in costume unless he is acting in his episode*. The whole performance must be treated as if it were taking place in a theatre, and the stage life and real life must be kept completely separate. They must change between performances if they wish to go out to see their friends, and they must remain behind until their episode is over. Even after endless exhortations, rebels will still be found on the day, but they must be dealt with firmly. Nothing gives a pageant a more shoddy look than the groups of performers half in costume and half out, lounging about among their friends, and nothing can more completely shatter the illusion that it has taken months to create. The Press delights in incongruities of this kind, and pays more attention to pictures of Lady Blank as Queen Elizabeth, talking to Lord Dash as a medieval bishop, who has taken off his mitre and put on his Homburg, than to anything else. With a large cast it is extraordinarily difficult to prevent players from creeping round bushes or climbing over walls in full costume and taking up a good place, in full view of the audience, to watch the scenes.

In order to ensure that the cast do none of these dreadful things, it is most necessary that careful organization be done behind the scenes.

The entrances and exits must be arranged so that no outgoing crowd will meet any incoming one; one person will be stationed at each to see that everything is in order, and will give out and take back the necessary

props. Large notices, "SILENCE" and "NO SMOKING," will be needed a little way back, and he will have to see that these are rigidly obeyed. The entrances must all be easily accessible from behind; if a number of soldiers are to pour over a wall, for instance, there must be plenty of ladders for them. The man in charge of the exit has to keep the players out of sight until they make their entrance, and a line should be given beyond which they should not pass. (But they will, if they can!) The cue for the entrances is given by signals, and he must watch for these, and respond instantly. The signals are given in different ways, according to the financial position of the Committee; they may be flags, or telephone, or bells, or loud speakers; if possible, the last are best, as they enable the whole crowd as well as the man-in-charge to hear.

I have mentioned the possible evil-doings of the cast, but many of these will not occur if the players are happy and comfortable, and not allowed to get too tired. At Oberammergau, after the first performance, players come and go between their appearances, and Pilate may wait on his guests at dinner. There is no reason why pageant players should not do likewise, if they are thoroughly trained at rehearsals. Each episode must be perfectly ready when the preceding episode goes on, but when the first two performances have been given, the sub-producer will know just how long it will take to get them ready, and can allot them a certain time for arrival. When there are many children in the cast this is especially important, for several days of performance, which mean hanging about behind the scenes for hours, are bad for them. The value of several dress rehearsals

for each episode comes in here, and, in due course, the costume and make-up take a short time.

Dressing accommodation should be well behind the scenes, and there should be enough benches for everyone to sit on between scenes. The players must be free to laugh and talk there as much as they wish, and they will then be far more willing to keep complete silence when they are anywhere near the stage. To secure, if possible, a barn or disused stables for dressing-rooms will save the expense of marquees, and be more convenient.

There must be water within reach, and plenty of lavatory accommodation. The tents and dressing-rooms should be fitted like the episode workrooms, with clothes wires all along the side or in alleys up and down the middle, on which the costumes can go on their own hangers. The players will then put their own clothes on the hanger when they dress, and replace the costume when they change again. Long trestle tables, with a supply of mirrors, will be needed for make-up, and a special room should be set aside for the expert maker-up who does the principals, and puts finishing touches all round. Each Wardrobe Mistress will bring as many dressers as are needed for her episode, and each will be armed with material for mending. It will be necessary to have a place for washing and ironing during performances, in case of bad weather; besides, muslins and starched linens need freshening each day.

There should be a refreshment stall near the dressing-tents, so that all performers can get their tea when they want it—an important matter when many women are gathered together! The players' car-park should be near the dressing-rooms, if possible. Many people

prefer to dress in their cars, and the pressure on the dressing-room is relieved if they do so.

The Property-Master will also want some place for storage of props, and a small mending shed, as accidents will happen. It is always wise to make a few extra weapons if there is to be a fight, for some will certainly get broken. Players should never be allowed to keep their own properties; they will either lose them or play with them, and either may be disastrous.

Before the final rehearsal and performance each player should be given a paper telling him exactly what he is to do, and where he is to go: he must report to the Sub-producer, and will get his clothes in one place, his crown in another, and his sword in another, etc. This will save the Secretary much questioning, and will make for good order behind the scenes.

Temporary stabling will be needed for horses. The Grounds Committee will have to arrange for this, and also for the loan of any empty stables that there may be; anyone who has charge of horses at a horse or an agricultural show will know how to house the horses properly.

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## CHAPTER XI

### COSTUME, MAKE-UP, MUSIC

THE Mistress of the Robes has to think on a large scale when planning the general design of the costumes. Each different setting will contribute something to her plan, for it will give some special colour note that must be used; an old castle may be built of granite or red sandstone, the foliage behind the players may vary, and the differing tones of elms, yews, or copper beeches, or of large flowering bushes will influence her use of colour. If she sees the site first in the winter, she should discover what the foliage is going to be in the summer.

In most pageants there is a large proportion of green in the setting, which can be used to effect. If it is desired to make the players one with the background, the effect is easily got by dressing them in greens that tone with it. Fairies, for example, are traditionally dressed in green, and the effect can be heightened with green in the make-up, green hair, beards, etc., which will make them nearly invisible among the foliage when they are still. Foresters, for the same reason, are usually dressed in green, and in a large group of peasantry, who are naturally linked with Nature, green is useful. Of course, the foliage itself makes it imperative that no exotic greens be used, and emerald and jade are quite wrong on a grassy stage. On the other hand, if characters are to stand out in front of the setting, it is better to cut out altogether the strong note

that the setting gives. An exception to this is perhaps found in the men in armour who appear so much before a castle; the armour must tone with the masonry, but the contrast can be got by a free use of heraldry. The effect of this was shown in the Framlingham Pageant, where the heraldic banners gave an effective focus. Heraldry might be used in pageants a great deal more than it is, and it must have been so much a part of the life of the Middle Ages that the picture of the life is hardly complete without a good deal of it.

Colour must be used in mass out of doors, but mass must not be confused with uniformity. Both are valuable to convey definite ideas, but the Mistress of the Robes should use either deliberately. A uniform dress gives a set idea with the elimination of personality and individuality; it carries with it uniform movement, as with soldiers, monks, and nuns, etc., and says something quite definite: the mass, however, conveys the flowing together of different personalities into one by some sympathy of idea, as in a mourning crowd, a group of Puritans, etc.—a general unity of idea without discipline. The mass treatment needs a sensitive touch; it is not enough to buy yards of the same material and dress everybody in it; the mass colour effect is better reached by using all the scale of tones that go to make up a colour. Grey, for instance, becomes alive by using all its own different shades, running off into lilacs and soft blues at one end, and into dark purples and a little black at the other, the proportioning of the shades being a subtle affair. The value of home-dyeing comes out in this mass colour work, for nothing is easier than to break up the colour in the dye-bath, by letting it dye unevenly, by changing the next dip slightly, by dyeing

the stuff one shade, and then letting its ends hang in a deeper dye, and so on.

The definite note of uniform dress is also most useful, but needs balancing with variety in the rest of the scene if it is to be thoroughly effective; in medieval times it is got in the dress of any lord's retainers, who were numerous, and who wore his colours, and in the dress of the religious orders; after Cromwell's time we get military uniforms and a good deal of official uniform dress.

Everyone reacts, almost unconsciously, to symbolism in colour, which goes back to antiquity, possibly even to pre-human times, since all animals see, and attach a meaning to, the colour red. This symbolism will all help to drive any idea home. The Mistress of the Robes must study dyes and textiles in order to know what type of colouring each period used, and what people meant by the colour at the time; mourning or wedding colours, for example, were not always the same. Contrast is, of course, tremendously important on a large stage, and she must do all she can to help out the contrast of the drama in her clothes—to make the principals stand out it is necessary to make every possible use of it, even to exaggeration. The medieval periods are the easiest for this purpose, as indeed for most purposes, since there is so much opportunity for variety in colour, form, and decoration, but a period that does offer easy opportunities for contrast is the time of the Civil Wars. Georgian dress is always popular with the players, but actually is not easy to use in outdoor work. It was a dress that was designed for indoor wear and for an artificial life, and it always seems wrong on a pageant stage. An obviously important contrast is

that between poor and rich, and this needs some study. The more extravagant forms of rich dress can be used on your large stage very effectively, and the more



*Photo by Fitzgerald, Plymouth*

THE BRETON SPY: LAUNGESTON

Producer: Mary Kelly

extravagant they are the better they contrast with the dress of the poor. The peasantry have made little change in their dress throughout history, and in mass the effect is nearly uniform. The general effect will be of strong but worn and faded dress, made of homespun, and all brought down to a similarity of tone by the weather. For festival occasions the dress will be

smartened with ribbons and flowers, and the material may appear newer, but a peasant crowd should never, in any circumstances, be dressed in bright new casement cloth. The most commonly used dyes were blue, scarlet, crimson, and shades of brown and ochre. In Tudor times the "inland folk" were described as wearing "russet-grey," which sounds a contradiction in terms. It may not be generally known that "grey" is the natural shade of the undyed material, and, since different breeds of sheep have different fleeces, this varies greatly with the locality, hodden grey in the north being quite different from the "grey" in the south. (The disputes over the actual colour of the Franciscans' "grey" arise from this fact.) The scarlet petticoat was also characteristic of the peasant woman in the days of Elizabeth, and the scarlet and crimson hooded cloaks worn by farmers' wives when going to market are a pleasant note in a crowd. The dress of the Elizabethan farmer's wife survives in the so-called Welsh National Dress. Special notes on material will be found in my little book, *On English Costume* (Deane).

The Mistress of the Robes must undertake a great deal of study on all the periods of the pageant, for she must know the dress of the various classes, professions, and ages of each time, of what material it was made, how it was worn, and what it all meant. The Wardrobe Mistresses want to know just as much about their individual episodes, and should teach their helpers too. But when the study has been carefully done, the information should be allowed to settle down for a while. There must be a certain process of forgetting, in order that the essentials shall rise to the surface,

and the general character of the period appear, not confused with too much detail. If the designs are made immediately after the study, fussy details will certainly creep in and weaken the force of the design. There are certain pitfalls into which pageant dress frequently tumbles. One is the desire of individual players to be smarter than anyone else, and to rebel against any concerted design. These people insist on going independently to costumiers, and choosing their own dress; moreover they will pay any price for this. If such people can be got to realize that their dress must be chosen by the Mistress of the Robes, and by no one else, and that the large sums that they pay to satisfy their own vanity might, if subscribed to the Costume Fund, dress quite a number of other people, a good deal will be achieved.

Another trap is the dressing of all gentry as if they were courtiers. I have seen a group of Cavalier officers in the field, fighting a losing cause, dressed in full court dress and wearing light kid shoes with rosettes, on horseback! Squire Hardcastle tells us something of dress of the country gentleman, and almost every portrait and monument shows us how far behind the fashions these were.

Professional and occupational dress is worth study if the crowds are to get individualization in any way; the dress of the pilgrim, either man or woman, is well known, but perhaps that of the tooth drawer is less familiar. He wore what might have been more appropriately worn by his patients, a white feather! There was a great deal of occupational dress in the Middle Ages, when traders and professional men were itinerant, and it gives a pleasant variety in a crowd. It should

be remembered that the parish clergy had no regular outdoor dress at this time, though they were enjoined to wear dark clothes, and the cowl; that neither they nor the monks always wore what they should have worn is evident from the indignation of preachers, and the caustic comments of Langland and other anti-clerical writers.

If all the costumes are to be hired, the Mistress of the Robes will herself see the type of costume supplied by the different firms, and will get estimates; she should ensure in ordering that the costumes that she chooses are really booked to her, and subsequently sent. (I myself have spent some time in choosing a large number of costumes from a well-known firm, and found later that not one had been sent.) If the measurements have all been taken early no confusion need arise, and the orders can be placed with the firms in good time. It is, alas, not unnecessary to add that hired costumes must be treated carefully. Having run a Costume Department for twelve years, I know something of what pageant-players do in the excitement of the moment. They wear tights without shoes, and return them footless; they cut off the hems of medieval robes so that they just clear the ground; they pack hats, bonnets, and crowns at the bottoms of hampers and all the rest of the clothes on the top, and many another evil thing besides, so that the damage on a pageant order is often very serious indeed. It is not their fault that the costumes are covered with mud at times, but the careless treatment of costumes that are not their own is inexcusable.

The Wardrobe Mistress of each episode will have many chances to get it into her players' heads that it is

not possible for everyone to be dressed in silks and satins and look lovely, and that some will have to be in rags and hessian, and made to look very ugly indeed; she should not lose these chances, if she is to avoid ill-feelings at the end.

Make-up must be carefully considered. An expert will be needed for the principals, for their make-up is rather specialized; the characters may be familiar to the audience, or there may be portraits to be copied, and in any case the amount of emphasis needed for the large distant stage is not quite easily understood by the players. The expert should look over the crowds, but if the make-up people belonging to each episode have learnt their jobs thoroughly, there should be few mistakes to correct. The crowd should be trained to do its own arms and legs, and the simple "street make-up," which is all that they need, and some at least should be able to manage their own beards and moustaches. They must be practised in these, and no beard should be passed that is not thoroughly convincing, for it is on beards that pageants scenes often fail. Children need little make-up; only a little dry rouge or ordinary lipstick if they are pale. The players should not be allowed to get at the grease-paints without express leave from the Wardrobe Mistress. The expression of the crowds lies in their movements rather than in their faces, for the faces are extremely small at a distance, and, therefore, heavy make-up is unnecessary.

*Theatre and Stage* provides valuable help in its articles on make-up, and the various books on the subject can be obtained by members from the British Drama League Library.

The Pageant-Master wants, in his Master of the



Music, a person of real musical knowledge and imagination. He should know a good deal about the history of music, in order to apply it rightly during the scenes, and to be able to reproduce it with the materials possible to him. He will often have to compose a song or dance, if he cannot find the right thing for the purpose, and he will be responsible for all the odds and ends of musical sounds that are used—the pipes and drums, trumpets, fiddles, horns, and so on. In the linking of the scenes by music, he can do an enormous amount to help out the whole emotional effect of the pageant. He can almost salve a feeble pageant in this way, and with a good one he can intensify and amplify the whole meaning. This alliance of the pageant with music is often completely overlooked, and all that is done is to play cheerful tunes to fill up time! Besides planning all the music, he has to get it performed, and this will cause him some anxiety. If he is to have an orchestra it must be housed and kept dry; it will take up a great deal of room somewhere, and it will certainly cost a great deal; for in outdoor work a few fiddles and 'celli go nowhere, and the bigger instruments are absolutely necessary—these are often difficult to get in a country district, and the orchestra is a real problem all round. I have never been happier with music than when I had the apparatus invented by Messrs. Roe and Briggs, Bude, Cornwall, for relaying electrically recorded tunes. This goes about in a little lorry, and can be set up without any difficulty quite quickly. Through it all the signals were given behind the scenes, and announcements were made to the audience when necessary, and through it I was able to have the bells of St. Margaret's, Westminster, the English Singers, and any other music

I wanted. It could be faded out, altered in pace, stopped or begun in a second, all from the prompt box, and the effect was so convincing to the audience that they always applauded the English Singers, thinking they were a choir behind the scenes.

## CHAPTER XII

### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT, ETC.

FOR a pageant of any size a paid publicity agent is necessary, but for smaller ones an agent's salary is not always possible, and the publicity has to be done by the Secretary and his helpers. The casts themselves should be able to do a great deal of it, for every player could bring at least two spectators from among his friends and admirers, and probably many more if he realized a responsibility for doing so. The whole cast of each episode should, therefore, be asked to help in making the pageant known, and each episode organization should include a booking office. The first day is, of course, of the greatest importance, for, if it is successful, it should cover the expenses of the pageant, and act as the best possible advertisement for the whole series of performances. One has to allow, especially in the country, for the large numbers of people who will wait to see whether a show is going to be a success before they risk coming to it; and the first day, with a good Press, is the thing to convince them. The casts should, therefore, try to get their friends and relations for the first day, in order to secure an appreciative audience: the personal interest of the players will give the whole thing a good start, and, after that, if the pageant is worth anything, the audiences will steadily increase.

Public interest has to be carefully nursed during the whole time of preparation in different ways. The

players and workers talk about it, because they are keen, and their intimate friends and neighbours will certainly hear of it thus; the book itself should be on sale at all the leading booksellers as soon as possible; the County Library should be asked to send round books on the history that is to be treated in the pageant, and if there is a good historical lecturer in the district, he can do a great deal by going round and lecturing on the same subjects. *The Poster and Handbill* are most important, and the Committee should not be too stingy over this, since they influence the minds of the potential audience considerably. An ordinary poster with a herald blowing a trumpet will suggest an ordinary pageant, and those who do not like pageants will stay away. A mysterious arrangement of distortions will suggest something "modern," and may easily frighten off the ordinary audience, leaving only the small company of earnest souls, who will not cover the costs. But a poster that does show originality and yet suggests that there is to be a pageant, is excellent, and the work should be put into the hands of an artist. It is not necessary to use a number of colours, and far more striking work can be done by limiting their use. The handbill should have the same design, and some decorative badge might be made for note-paper and programmes.

Another method of publicity is through the shipping and travel agencies, some of which have long lists of people who desire above all things to see pageants while they are in England. The interest in pageants is particularly great in America, and it is well worth while advertising in the American shipping lines. All transport agencies should be approached early, both for arrangement of special services and for the display

of posters and handbills; and the slip notices on private cars are an excellent reminder during the last few weeks.

Advance publicity through the Press is naturally important, and the local papers should be kept supplied with little bits of news about the pageant, photographs of people (preferably titled people) taking part, and doing unusual things in the general preparation for the pageant. Photographs of groups of players posed for the scene are also useful, but it is not necessary to sink to such silly pieces of incongruity as medieval bishops drinking cocktails after rehearsal, or knights driving away in their cars. All this has been done so often that it is completely hackneyed, and no longer amuses the public.

It is customary, and wise, to offer reduced tickets to parties from schools, Women's Institutes, and other organizations, and an early approach should be made to these. If the teachers can see from the book that the pageant is really going to give the children some light upon history, they will welcome it, and will probably use it in their school work in preparation. If it is not worth anything, they may still bring the children, for the pleasure that these get from knights and cavaliers on horseback, and a lovely lot of corpses on the stage. A little country school, planted down in so desolate a country that it seemed 'inconceivable that children could be found to fill it, studied, rehearsed, and played in their schoolyard the whole of a pageant that was to be performed locally. They really knew what the history meant, and their enjoyment of the final performance was intense.

Amateur societies that cannot take part might well be offered reduced rates; they will form an interested

and critical audience. It will not be too easy to convince them, however, that a pageant is to be regarded as drama at all, since most of them have seen the usual type and have dismissed it as valueless.

It is better to sell the book everywhere and all the time than to print expensive programmes, with long, dull lists of names and synopses of the scenes. If the book really is a book worth printing, print it early, and get schools, societies, etc., to buy it beforehand, and push the sales in every way. With good organization, quite an elaborate book can be made to pay well, and the importance of getting it sold well in advance is that your audience may come with some knowledge of the history, and so be prepared to watch the pageant intelligently. ("Yes," I heard a lady say behind me at Runnymede, "it was King John who got the Danes to burn down Chertsey Abbey, dear!") If they have to buy the book instead of the lists of names that make the programme, they will be able to read the scenes between the episodes, and even to get hold of what the prefaces mean; one has to remember that the knowledge of history that the public possesses is well summed up in *1066 and All That* and so it should be given every possible opportunity to understand what the pageant is about. The list programme is not necessary if the players are sufficiently *in* the pageant; they should be prepared to act anonymously, and, indeed, are wiser in doing so when the audience is mainly composed of friends and relations!

Insurance against rain is satisfactory, provided enough rain is registered, but in a country where soft, damp mists may obliterate the stage for the whole day, and yet make no impression on the rain gauge, it is

useless. Also, rain may fall heavily while the audience should be starting, but cease when the pageant begins, so that the insurance cannot be claimed. The best possible insurance is really good advance booking, done by thoroughly competent people. If the seats are sold beforehand, the audience will probably turn up even if it does rain, and the costs of the pageant will be covered. The booking is not a matter for artistic people—they should be kept quite firmly out of it—but for those who really do know the job. It is, even for a village pageant, a big concern, and there must be no possibility of muddle.

It may appear that I have been concentrating entirely on the large-scale pageant, but actually the same kind of organization is needed for every kind of pageant and the same care should be taken over details of organization. Naturally, there will be less money to start on, fewer and smaller salaries will be offered, and a great deal of voluntary work will be needed for the village pageant. But voluntary workers should fully understand what is required of them before they take on any job. Villages need not fear the expense of a pageant if they set to work sensibly, and it is, indeed, possible for them to make quite a good profit. There are so many ingenious people in the country, accustomed to make bricks without straw, and village players have a special gift for ignoring insurmountable difficulties until they are on the other side of them. There is, too, a quality that exists only in the country—neighbourliness, which helps things along most excellently. Again, you find, all over the countryside, that strong tie or relationship with the land which is so important a part of the pageant; and among agricultural people there

is a feeling of timelessness that makes the past and present one. A village pageant can have a delightful unconventionality about it—as if it just sprang out of the ground—which is not so easy to get in the civic or county pageant—the charming village of Wrotham, in Kent, just below the Pilgrim's Way, held one in the middle of the village street, and raised their spectators on farm wagons!

It is always possible to get neighbouring villages to take some of the episodes, if the organizing village cannot get crowd enough to go round, but the main incidents will probably be done by the latter, and a certain friendly rivalry will inevitably arise between them all. The educational value is particularly great in these smaller pageants, since it is easier to get the whole cast thoroughly permeated with the history and spirit of each episode when it is taken by a small rural community than when there is a large unwieldy cast.

A pageant can be a very happy thing indeed, if it is undertaken with the desire to do a good piece of work. There is so much enjoyment in meeting so many people over it, and in the rehearsals on long summer evenings; the cast will become infected with acting. They find themselves doing things they had never thought of doing before, and then feeling things that they had never felt before. The company helps them, the thrill of the action helps them, the grass and the blue sky and the sunlight help them, and they are carried away into a region quite beyond their ordinary lives. All sorts of people find themselves acting in a pageant, and acting well, who would never dream of getting on to a small stage. For the producers, too, there is an extraordinary thrill in creating a unity out of a mass of



individuals, in seeing the idea fill them and come out of them.

All this joy of unity and accomplishment is really to be got only out of a big performance round some central idea that really matters to the performers; there must be the idea, there must be the drama, and there must be the artistic inspiration, or the pageant form will never be lifted out of the conventional and meaningless parade that it is gradually becoming.

## A LIST OF USEFUL BOOKS

THIS is not intended to be a full bibliography of the various subjects and periods, but a selection which will either give the reliable information necessary for a foundation, or help the dramatist and the producer in "creating atmosphere." The Subject-Index of the London Library, the bibliographies quoted below, and the local bibliographies that exist in each county will all be found invaluable for further guidance. One cannot over-estimate the importance of reading "sources" for the purpose of realizing the mentality of the time, and contemporary drama and stories should always be studied; after the Elizabethan time, too, there is a great deal of material in the form of letters, diaries, and memoirs, which it is not possible to list here. (Where a number of editions exist, the latest, or a good one, has been given.)

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